

General Practitioner's Attitudes and Confidence in Managing Patients with Dementia in Singapore

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Abstract

The number of people living with dementia is increasing globally as a result of an ageing population. General practitioners (GPs), as the front-line care providers in communities, are important stakeholders in the system of care for people with dementia. This commentary describes a study conducted to understand GPs' attitudes and self-perceived competencies when dealing with patients with dementia and their caregivers in Singapore. A set of study information sheet and survey questionnaires were mailed to selected GP clinics in Singapore. The survey, comprising the "GP Attitudes and Competencies Towards Dementia" questionnaire, was administered. A total of 400 GPs returned the survey, giving the study a response rate of 52.3%. About 74% of the GPs (n = 296) were seeing dementia patients in their clinics. Almost all the GPs strongly agreed or agreed that early recognition of dementia served the welfare of the patients (n = 385; 96%) and their relatives (n = 387; 97%). About half (51.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident carrying out an early diagnosis of dementia. Factor analysis of the questionnaire revealed 4 factors representing "benefits of early diagnosis and treatment of patients with dementia", "confidence in dealing with patients and caregiver of dementia", "negative perceptions towards dementia care" and "training needs". GPs in Singapore held a generally positive attitude towards the need for early dementia diagnosis but were not equally confident or comfortable about making the diagnosis themselves and communicating with and managing patients with dementia in the primary care setting. Dementia education and training should therefore be a critical first step in equipping GPs for dementia care in Singapore. Shared care teams could further help build up GPs' knowledge, confidence and comfort in managing patients with dementia.

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