Rural health and its influence on the GP perspective of dementia

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Aim

The study aimed to explore the General Practitioners (GPs) perspective of their role in dementia diagnosis and management, and to identify similarities and differences between rural and metropolitan based GP perspectives.

Methods

A systematic, non-probabilistic sampling approach was employed to recruit rural and metropolitan based GP participants. GPs were invited to complete a brief questionnaire consisting of 24 positively and negatively worded dementia attitudinal statements to be rated on a six point Likert-type scale. GPs also completed a brief demographic data form. Data was entered into Excel for descriptive analysis and was also exported into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Relevance

Australia, like the rest of the developed world, is in the midst of a dementia epidemic. This phenomenon will be most keenly felt in rural Australia where the proportion of people living and dying with dementia will increase more than in metropolitan areas, and where access to both general and specialist services to support people with dementia and their carers is restricted. The significant role the GP plays in the lives of older people as both a primary health-care provider and as a point of referral to other general and specialist health services cannot be under-estimated, particularly in rural areas where they are often the only health professional in the local community.

GPs clearly play a pivotal role in the diagnosis and management of dementia, however evidence indicates inconsistencies in the way in which GPs perform this role. Understanding the way in which individual GPs think about dementia is essential in order to identify common issues that may influence their practice and that may be amenable to change.

Results

In total, GP Attitudes and Confidence Survey questionnaires were returned by 51 rurally-based GPs and by 79 GPs from metropolitan locations. All GPs who responded to the survey also provided some information on basic demographics which allows an insight into the overall context of responders. There were some statements to which the majority of all GPs felt strongly about, however there were quite a few statements that GPs obviously felt less confident about.

Conclusions

The data supports the theory that GPs differ in their perspective on the diagnosis and management of dementia. GP responses to the questionnaire statements were influenced more by age and gender than by geographic location.
Presentation

This presentation will outline the results of the GP Attitudes and Confidence Survey and compare responses of rural and metropolitan GPs.

Presenter

Angela Crombie is the Director of Bendigo Health’s Collaborative Health Education and Research Centre (CHERC) where she is responsible for the day-to-day operations, coordination and management of education programs, research and projects across the organisation. Angela has a nursing background and over the past 20 years she has specialised in aged care in clinical, education and research work. Angela is a passionate advocate for rural and regional research and has focused her research activities on improving the quality of life of people with dementia living in rural areas. Most recently she has worked with rural GPs to explore their perspective of their role in dementia diagnosis and management, and to identify similarities and differences between rural and metropolitan based GP perspectives, which is the focus of her presentation.