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The brave new world of older patients: preparing general practice training for an ageing population

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The brave new world of older patients: preparing general practice training for an ageing population

Abstract

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THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF OLDER PATIENTS: PREPARING GENERAL PRACTICE TRAINING FOR AN AGEING POPULATION

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Background

Associated with multiple factors, general practice registrars (GPRs) see fewer older patients and patients with chronic conditions than their vocationally registered counterparts. Australian research indicates that just 25% of older patients feel comfortable with GPR chronic/complex care. This has impact upon the ecology of learning in training practices, reducing chronic and complex care experience and teaching opportunities. Developing effective strategies to improve trainee-older patient interaction is critical to general practice training, to meet the current and future needs of an ageing population.

Aims/objective

Develop and pilot test evidence-based resources for training practices to enhance older patients' (65+ years) interactions with GPRs.

Methods/approach

Adopting a social marketing approach, resources were developed to address knowledge and attitudinal barriers at the practice and patient level to improve older patient comfort and interaction with GPR care. Two focus groups with older patients (n=18) and interviews with staff of training practices (n=12) were utilised to pre-test resources. Amended resources were pilot tested and evaluated in a naturalistic training practice setting using a structured patient questionnaire (n=44).

Results/findings

Pilot evaluation suggests improved comfort and willingness of older patients to interact with GPRs following deployment of the resources for three months. Fifty-four per cent of survey participants indicated they would be more likely to make an appointment with a registrar in the future and 40% would feel comfortable having a GPR manage a complex or chronic condition following exposure to the resources in the pilot practice.

Discussion

The use of tailored, engaging and informative GPR resources for older patients and practice staff may be an important contributor to addressing the growing problem of ensuring GPRs are adequately engaged in treating older patients. The adoption of a participatory research methodology and a social marketing framework was instrumental in enhancing the acceptance and effectiveness of this intervention. Controlled trials of the resources are recommended.