



1st World Congress on Healthy Ageing, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT 116

To drive or not to drive: challenges for GPs in assessing and managing driving competence in older patients

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Key words: GP, driving

Background

A general practitioner's (GP's) role includes assessing patients' fitness to drive and supporting the medically unfit to either relinquish their licences or undergo further specialised assessment. Screening patients' driving competence is difficult. The implications for older people's independence and mobility of being able to drive are significant.

Objectives

This study aimed to investigate how GPs recognise, assess and manage and patients' fitness to drive, and their attitudes and beliefs about how the GPs' role can be supported.

Methods

Mixed methods, including a literature review, qualitative phase (face-to-face interviews and a focus group) and a survey circulated to GPs in metropolitan and rural Victoria, Australia.

Results

Seven GPs from metropolitan Victoria were interviewed and nine GPs from rural Victoria participated in a focus group. These results, plus information from the literature review informed questionnaire development. The questionnaire was mailed to 1028 GPs in metropolitan and rural Victoria. Twenty five percent completed and returned the survey. Of these, 62% agreed that GPs should be the initial assessors of patients' fitness to drive. Most agreed they were not particularly pro-active in conducting assessments and there was usually a specific trigger, such as a form from a driving licensing authority, an incident such as a driving accident, or contact by a concerned family member. Almost half (45%) were not comfortable conducting these assessments and accessing specialist assistance, such as occupational therapists was often difficult, especially in rural areas. The majority felt that further education in this field would be beneficial.

Conclusions

GPs are a logical first point of call to assess patients' medical capacity to drive. However, they lack confidence in their skills, and find certain aspects of assessment and management difficult. Further training and specialist support is required to assist GPs to successfully contribute to the challenge of assessing 'at-risk' older drivers.