The role of the Rapid Access Frailty Assessment Unit (RAFAU) in patients referred with cognitive impairment

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Background: The ageing population in Ireland is rising, as is the need to access specialized services. As a result, the RAFAU commenced in February 2021 at a level 3 hospital, to provide clinics for rapid comprehensive assessment of frail patients. In this audit we set out to examine the role of the RAFAU in older persons referred with cognitive impairment.

Methods: Data collection was quantitative. We examined patients referred with cognitive impairment. The data collected included: Clinical Frailty Scale, medication use, the medical and multidisciplinary interventions and follow up arrangements.

Results: From February 2021 to May 2022, 584 new patients attended the clinic. Of these, 154 older people were referred for cognitive issues. The majority had a Clinical Frailty Scale of between 2 and 5. 154 patients saw a Doctor and 13 were seen by the candidate Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP). 39 people were assessed by the Occupational Therapist. 46 were assessed by the Physiotherapist. Polypharmacy was prevalent, with 88 people taking between 5 and 15 medications. 99 of the 154 people seen had changes to their medications. This included memory medications and adjustment to medications for Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD). Diagnostic tests included CT brain, cardiac investigations and bloods. Follow-up included: return clinics to the Geriatrician and ANP and referral to primary care and voluntary services. A small number of patients were admitted to hospital.

Conclusion: Over 25% of the RAFAU referrals were for cognitive issues. The Clinical Frailty Scale suggests that this population is physically robust. RAFAU offers a multidisciplinary assessment in a one stop shop setting. This audit highlights the prevalence of cognitive issues in a frail older population and the interventions undertaken by the multidisciplinary team to address identified needs. Future research on the patient's perception and experience of the RAFAU service in their ongoing care needs would be beneficial.