ASSESSING OLDER PATIENTS’ RELIGIOUS VIEWS BY JUNIOR DOCTORS. A PILOT STUDY

A. Abdulla, C. Barla
Elderly Care Department, Princess Royal University Hospital

Background: Integrating older patients’ religious and spiritual views in the health care delivery process is important and now recognised as part of good medical practice. We conducted a pilot questionnaire survey looking at the junior doctors’ attitudes in relation to their older patients’ religious and spiritual views.

Sampling methods: We enquired about the frequency doctors asked elderly patients about their religion and why, whether they felt it was important to their patients, whether they would like religious and spiritual support for themselves if they were patients, knowledge of different religions and the usefulness of a seminar on religious and ethical considerations in health care.

Results: 30 doctors completed the pilot. 47% considered themselves religious and 33% thought that religious support was important if they were patients. Importantly, although 67% felt that religious and spiritual support was important to their patients, they either never asked patients (53%) or did so infrequently (47%). A third felt that time restraints and being busy were the main reason while a few felt it ‘embarrassing’ or lacked knowledge about religions. Surprisingly 20% thought that it was ‘not their job’ to ask and 43% felt it was not important to do so. Although only 3% felt they did not know very much about different religions, 89% considered training on these issues as useful or very useful.

Conclusions: Our pilot survey showed that the majority of doctors did not enquire about their patients’ religious views. Further training and emphasis on this aspect of patient care is important. The plan is to conduct a larger study among both junior doctors and nurses.