

CDPC Activity 1316 Healthy Ageing in Australian Physicians

Activity Outcomes Report

Project Plan: This one (1) year non-CDPC funding Activity ran from January 2014 to January 2015 and was planned to document the ways in which doctors experience and adapt to the ageing process, in particular, brain and physical changes with the goal of informing the development of evidence based approach to maintaining health and safe and sustainable practice. This Activity was not funded through the CDPC, however the researchers were closely aligned with the CDPC objectives and were willing to share evidence that might inform future research or implementation initiatives.

Research Approach: This Activity team had planned to use a descriptive and qualitative approach utilizing focus groups and one-on-one interviews, as well as completion of a review of the peer-reviewed and grey literature in the area of ageing and cognition in health practitioners (Synthesis and Dissemination). Discourse narrative and inductive thematic analysis were planned to be used to inform areas of subsequent enquiry (Collaborative New Research).

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Outcomes and Dissemination Summary:

While the research team for this non-funded Activity completed focus groups and the planned literature review (results summarised below), to date no peer-reviewed papers have been published as a result of this Activity to date (March 2017). While there is a strong intention in the research team, and the HERC application has been extended to allow for this, it is not feasible to undertake further investigation activities as there is no funding to support this.

Dissemination of information gleaned from focus groups and literature review has taken place through the below presentations by research team:

- October 2013 – Health Professionals Health Conference Australia attended by 100+ mostly doctors
- June 2014 - Well-Med International Conference on well-being for health clinicians – Workshop Seminar attended by 50+ international medical and other health professionals
- September 2014 – Age related changes. Presentation to the Doctors Health Advisory Service Annual conference day attended by 40+ doctors
- October 2014 – Prevention in dementia and implications for doctors. Grand rounds attended by 30+ hospital doctors
- August 2015 – RACGP annual scientific convention – Health Aging for Doctors attended by 100+ mainly GPs
- December 2014 – Surgeons retirement conference – Healthy Aging for Doctors attended by 40+ mainly surgeons

Results of Research Completed:

Focus Group/s

Focus group/s were held during June 2014 and the below research themes emerged from these for review:

- Should, or do, doctors have their own doctors?
- Questionnaires on physician retirement – is it feasible to execute a questionnaire amongst Australia doctors?
- What are the international statistics on ageing doctors and retirement?
- Are there differences in disturbed sleep recovery between younger and older doctors?
- Premorbid personality of doctors.



Literature Review

Literature review of 613 articles from PubMed and Cochrane Library was completed between November 2013 and February 2014 and outcomes were organised under some of the categories that emerged from focus group/s held during June 2014. The following are the most interesting results of the review as reported by the research team:

- There had been limited research on the influence of ageing physicians on the quality of care had been previously carried out.
- There were indications older doctors perform less well than their younger counterparts, with a 2005 systematic review showing that “70% of studies demonstrated a negative association between length of time in practice and several measures of good physician performance” (Choudhry et al, 2005) .
- Research had shown that older doctors have lower levels of psychological distress, burnout, and an improved work-life balance and they also experience an increased level of credibility and respect from patients and have greater tolerance and respect of patients. They may also be better teachers.

Doctors having their own doctors.

This search was carried out to find literature on how many Australian doctors have their own GP. The most interesting result was a 2008 systematic review by Kay et al., which included 5 Australian studies reporting numbers of 42-55% of doctors being registered with their own doctor. Also interesting to this regard was Kerry Breen's viewpoint on doctors having their own doctor after the code of conduct for doctors in Australia developed by the Medical Board of Australia became effective (<http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Policies.aspx>). This code states that good medical practice involves having a general practitioner.

Questionnaires on physician retirement – is it feasible to execute a questionnaire amongst Australia doctors?

To investigate the feasibility of executing a questionnaire on retirement amongst Australian doctors, a search on existing surveys was carried out. Also, since questionnaire response rates amongst doctors are known to be low, literature addressing strategies to maximize response rates were summarized. The most important results were studies including details of their survey or individual answers. Strategies to improve response rates in surveys of physicians were amongst others; small financial incentives; postal and telephone strategies; first-class stamps on return envelopes; questionnaires designed to be brief, personalized, and endorsed by legitimizing professional associations; non internet-based] or when at least three reminders are sent.

What are the international statistics on ageing doctors and retirement?

The Australian population and its medical workforce is ageing. In 2012, of the 79,653 medical practitioners employed in medicine in Australia, roughly 26.5% was older than 55 years, 9% was older than 65 years, and 1.6% was older than 75 years. Doctors aged 65 and over work on average 33 hours a week, compared to 42.2 – 46.7 hours in younger age groups. Nonetheless, 3407 (50%) of these older doctors work more than 35 hours a week. And 1324 (19%) work more than 50 hours a week on average.

Canada seemed to have the oldest population of doctors, with 41% of physicians aged 55 or over, and 16% being older than 65 years of age in 2013.

In the United States, almost 28% of active physicians were 60 years or older in 2012. And, 18% of them were 65 years or older.

In New Zealand the average age of doctors in 2012 was 45.4 years; roughly 25% of doctors were older than 55 years; 14% were older than 60 years; and, 7% were older than 65 years.

In Europe, between 1995 and 2000, the number of physicians under the age of 45 across Europe dropped by 20%, whilst the number aged over 45 went up by over 50%.

The United Kingdom: The General Medical Council website has monthly updated statistical information about doctors on the List of Registered Medical Practitioners (LRMP) the General Practitioners (GP) Register and the



Specialist Register. In March 2014, 11.3% of all doctors was older than 55 years and 4.7% was older than 65 years. www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/register/search_stats.asp

France: The most striking feature of the period 2010-2025 will be the aging of the medical workforce. Doctors aged 55 years and over will be between 42% and 47% of the medical workforce in 2025, as compared to 41% in 2010 and 14% in 2000.

Belgium : "Of the active GPs in our country, 35% is 55 years or older. Of the 12.000 GPs seen as active by the RIZIV, 4000 are 55 or older. Of the GPs, 869 or 7% is older than 65 years and 409 GPs are even older than 70 years. Moreover, the group of 3382 GPs of 55-65 years are the most active within the professional group, 2775 have an average or above average size surgery." www.sweetlove.be/act_huisarts2.htm

Netherlands: Of the medical specialists, 6.6% is currently older than 65 years and 30.1% is older than 55 years. Of the GPs, 1% is older than 65 years, 12% is older than 60 years, 32% is older than 55 years. The mean retirement age for medical specialists is 62.5 years and for GPs 61.5 years.

For Asia, Africa and South America/ Latin America no statistical information could be retrieved.

Are there differences in disturbed sleep recovery between younger and older doctors?

This search was carried out to answer the question if older people recover slower from broken sleep. There was little literature on broken sleep specifically, but a lot on night shifts and age, and some interesting articles were found, mostly older but also some recent ones. An interesting result was a 2011 Dutch systematic review which showed there is some evidence that recovery time from sleep disturbance is longer in older age. However some studies found the opposite; that older shift workers cope better than younger ones, or just as well.