

CH Research day

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Decision-Making Capacity Assessment Education for Physicians: Current State and Future Directions

Background

A person's capacity to make personal/financial decisions is an important component of independence. Family physicians, because of their longstanding relationships and familiarity with patients, are well-positioned to assess this capacity.

Objective

The objective of this pilot study was to examine the training needs of family physicians (FPs) regarding Decision-Making Capacity Assessments (DMCAs) and ways in which training materials, based on a DMCA Model, might be adapted for use by FPs.

Method

We did a scoping review of the literature to examine the current status of physician education regarding assessment of decision-making capacity (DMC). Also, we conducted a focus group and interviews with Albertan FPs to ascertain the educational needs of FPs in this area.

Result

Based on the scoping review of the literature, four main themes emerged: increasing saliency of DMCAs due to an aging population, sub-optimal DMCA training for physicians, inconsistent approaches to DMCA, and tension between autonomy and protection.

The findings of the focus groups and interviews indicate that, while FPs working as independent practitioners or on inter-professional (IP) teams are motivated to engage in DMCAs and utilize the DMCA Model for those assessments, several factors impede them from conducting DMCAs. The most notable factors are a lack of education, isolation from IP teams, uneasiness around managing conflict with families, fear of liability, and concerns regarding remuneration.

Conclusion

This pilot study has helped to inform ways to better train and support FPs conducting DMCAs. FPs are well-positioned, with proper training, to effectively conduct DMCAs. To engage in the process, however, the barriers should be addressed.