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A Survey on the Knowledge, Awareness and Attitude of Advance Directives among Frontline Nursing Staff

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Introduction

An advance directive (AD) generally refers to a mechanism by which a competent individual expresses his or her wishes regarding his or her medical treatment should circumstances arise when he or she is no longer mentally or physically competent to do so. It has been suggested that enhancing the knowledge level and attitude towards AD among healthcare staff would foster the implementation of AD. A specific local study regarding the attitude and knowledge level of AD among health care professionals, in particular since the availability of the local healthcare authority guideline is lacking. This study was undertaken to delineate any knowledge deficit and suboptimal attitude regarding advance directives among nursing staff. This may aid improving the utilization rate of AD.

Objectives

To examine the knowledge level and attitude of AD among nursing staff in the internal medicine department of an acute regional hospital. We further explored if there is any association between the knowledge level towards advance directives among nursing staff and other factors such as attitude and socio-demographic characteristics among them.

Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted where nursing staff in the medical department of a regional acute hospital was recruited to complete a self-devised questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the knowledge level and attitude towards AD as well as sociodemographic background of the respondents were assessed. In particular, knowledge level regarding the AD under the current local legal framework and Hospital Authority policy was assessed. These data were analysed to delineate concerning the present attitude and knowledge level towards advance directives among nursing staff. Also, any potential association between these factors as well as sociodemographic data of the respondents was analysed.

Result

A total of 99 of the eligible nursing staff completed the questionnaire. 92.9 % of the respondents (n=92) supported adoption of AD in Hong Kong, while 84.8% would like to set up an AD for themselves in the future. The mean score regarding the knowledge level of AD among respondent is 11.6 out of 20. Knowledge level regarding AD among nursing staff were positively associated with the age, years of experience, rank of the responding nursing staff and a presence of self-reported history of caring patient with AD. It is also negatively associated, though marginally, with a high perception of potential obstacles in adopting AD.

Conclusion: Nursing staff, in general, poses a positive attitude towards the use of AD in advance care planning. However, knowledge deficit regarding the use of AD, in particular the unfamiliarity towards local authority guidelines on AD among the nursing staff was identified in the study. Reservations regarding the use of AD due to potential legal consequence and expected additional workload were also identified. Local healthcare authority should consider strengthening the knowledge level of relevant staff and addressing the manpower need while the relevant policy maker should foster a specific legislation provision on the use of AD as measures to remove the potential obstacles in implementation of AD.