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Questionnaire Study on the Attitude of Doctors Working in Emergency Department in Hong Kong towards Rape Victims

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Introduction

In 2002, a study by Wong showed that doctors working in local emergency departments (ED) in general had a favourable attitude towards rape victims but there was room for improvement and formal training was lacking.

Objectives

This study was conducted to explore and compare the attitude of local physicians towards rape victims now with those who were working 14 years ago. Knowledge on management of sexual assault (SA) victims and behaviour were also investigated.

Methodology

Method: This was a multi-centre study. Questionnaires were distributed to doctors working in emergency department in eight local hospitals. The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts: (1) the modified Attitude towards Rape Victims Scale 4 (ARVS); (2) demographics and the usual practice in managing sexual assault victims; and (3) a knowledge test on management of sexual assault victims. Drafts of the questionnaire were distributed to emergency physicians of different EDs to test the face validity. Comparisons of the attitude, knowledge scores and behavior were made between doctors of different genders, ranks, and training received. A logistic regression was modelled to predict avoidance to encounter rape victims, using variables of doctors' gender, attitude, knowledge and recent training.

Result

About 245 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 145 filled questionnaires were collected i.e. return rate of 59%. One questionnaire was rejected from analysis because there was no response on questions on attitude. Most doctors held a favourable and better attitude towards rape victims (attitude score 38.2 vs 31.8) compared with the study 14 years ago. Female doctors in general had a more favourable attitude. There was no significant difference between ranks and training received. Emergency Medicine (EM) specialists performed better in the knowledge test. The correlation between knowledge and attitude scores was low (Spearman

coefficient 0.068; $p=0.416$). Doctors with a favourable attitude did not avoid seeing sexual assault victims (odds ratio 0.23; 95% CI 0.08-0.66; $p=0.006$). Doctors with high knowledge score tended to avoid seeing sexual assault victims (odds ratio 1.55; 95% CI 1.00 – 2.40; $p=0.049$). In conclusion, doctors working in ED nowadays are having better attitude towards rape victims comparing to those 14 years ago. Doctors with favourable attitude will not avoid seeing sexual assault victims while better knowledge of the doctor may increase hesitancy to encounter rape victims. Attitude is independent from knowledge, previous training and ranks. Further education or training should focus on attitude modulation in addition to knowledge.