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Common Knowledge and Attitude towards Dementia Among the Hong Kong Public Survey Results

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September, 2005

Introduction

1. Since 21 September is the World Alzheimer's Day and the theme of this year is "Challenging the Stigma of Dementia Worldwide", the Jockey Club Centre for Positive Ageing, School of Public Health of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Elderly Health Services of the Department of Health have jointly conducted a survey on "Common Knowledge and Attitude towards Dementia among the Hong Kong Public". The aim of this survey was: (a) To explore the public's knowledge and attitude towards dementia; and (b) To understand the public's personal experience in relation to dementia. It is hoped that the results from this survey would provide information for the development and design of public education program, strengthen understanding of dementia among the general public, and help related departments and organizations to determine their course of action.

Method

2. The Asia Pacific Research Centre, CUHK, was commissioned to conduct the survey. A total of 1002 Hong Kong people (433 males and 569 females) with their age ranging from 18 to 64 participated in the study through a phone survey. The overall response rate was 53.8%. Respondents were asked on their knowledge and attitude towards dementia, as well as their personal experience in relation to dementia.

Respondents' Personal Experience in Relation to Dementia

3. 14.1% of the respondents indicated that they had demented close relatives at the time of the interview, only 1% of the respondents (N=10) indicated that they did not know / did not want to disclose whether they had any demented relative.
4. Among those who had demented relatives, 80.1% pointed out that the illness had resulted in varying degree of disturbance both to themselves and to their families. 39% of the respondents indicated that serious disturbance was brought about by the illness.

Respondents' Attitude towards Dementia

5. Our results showed that a great majority of the respondents (93.7%) did not mind disclosing that they have demented relative should it be the situation. At the same time, 42.6% of the respondents believed that dementia is treatable.

Respondents' Knowledge about Dementia

6. More than 80% of the respondents indicated that they knew what dementia is. Results from the present survey, however, showed that respondents had a variety of misconceptions about dementia and its symptoms. 59.7% of the respondents thought that dementia only affects one's memory, 32% of the respondents believed that it only affects elderly persons, and 24.8% of the respondents thought it is the same as Parkinson disease.

7. Only 73%, 66.3% and 66% of the respondents could respectively identify “being able to remember what happened 20 years ago, yet forget what one had for breakfast”, “forget simple expressions” and “have difficulty with simple money transactions” as early symptoms of dementia. Although “losing one’s way frequently” and “inappropriate toileting behaviour” were symptoms of late stage dementia, 94.4% and 53.5% of the respondents mistakenly identified them as early symptoms of dementia respectively.
8. 53% of the respondents believed that they did not need to consult a doctor even if “being able to remember what happened 20 years ago, yet forget what one had for breakfast” occurs, 62.4% of the respondents thought the same for “forget simple expressions”, and 55.7% of the respondents for “have difficulty with simple money transactions”. 28.2% of the respondents indicated that they would not consult a doctor even if “inappropriate toileting behaviour” happens and 15.5% of the respondents would not consult a doctor even if “losing one’s way frequently”.
9. Some of the respondents were yet to grasp proper understanding of preventive measures for dementia, only 60 to 80% of the respondents could identify frequent exercise (79.3%), doing voluntary work (75%), playing mahjong (70%) as measures that can help to preventing dementia. And, about 30% of the respondents (mistakenly) believed “taking brain nourishing supplement, vitamins, nutrition supplement would help prevent dementia”.
10. There are no major differences between the responses of those who had demented relatives and those who had not, the former did not necessarily display better understanding of dementia.

Recommendations

11. Based on the above findings, we observe that dementia does not seem to be a stigma as 90% response do not mind letting others know if they have a demented relative. However there is still much misconception about the disease. We have the following recommendations:
 - (a) Early medical consultation for those who suspect their family members may be having dementia, such that medical treatment and psychological intervention, as well as support for family members of the demented can be provided as early as possible.
 - (b) Cross-sectoral collaboration among the government, NGOs, and professional groups should be encouraged to launch public education program that aims at increasing understanding of healthy living, and of dementia, as well as to promote prevention , early detection and management of dementia.
 - (c) More research should be conducted on dementia, in order to gain better understanding of the situation of dementia in Hong Kong. The resultant findings would aid public education and strengthen fellow community’s understanding of dementia and assist concerned departments and organization in determining their course of action.

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Table One: Respondents' misconceptions about dementia

	With Demented Relatives (N = 141)	Without Demented Relatives (N = 851)	Total (N = 1002)
Same as Parkinson disease	22.0%	25.0%	24.8%
Same as insanity / mental illness	7.8%	6.6%	6.9%
Same as depression	18.4%	13.3%	14.0%
Only elderly persons are affected	31.9%	31.7%	32.0%
Only affect one's memory	61.7%	59.2%	59.7%

Note: All of the above are misconceptions about dementia

Table Two: Respondents' understanding and misconceptions about the early symptoms of dementia

	With Demented Relatives (N = 141)	Without Demented Relatives (N = 851)	Total (N = 1002)
Being able to remember what happened 20 years ago, yet forget what one had for breakfast *	85.1%	70.7%	73.0%
Forget simple expressions	73.0%	65.3%	66.3%
Have difficulty handling financial transactions *	75.2%	64.4%	66.0%
Suicidal ^M *	18.4%	9.6%	10.9%
Lost of appetite ^M *	19.9%	10.3%	11.6%
Excreting everywhere ^M	59.6%	52.5%	53.5%
Losing one's way frequently	97.9%	93.9%	94.4%

Note : ^M Misconceptions ; * Group Differences

Table Three: Respondents' perception of situations that require medication consultation

	With Demented Relatives (N = 141)	Without Demented Relatives (N = 851)	Total (N = 1002)
Being able to remember what happened 20 years ago, yet forget what one had for breakfast	51.1%	46.3%	47.0%
Forget simple expressions	41.1%	37.0%	37.6%
Have difficulty handling financial transactions	50.4%	43.4%	44.3%
Excreting everywhere ^M	76.6%	71.2%	71.8%
Losing one's way frequently	86.5%	85.8%	85.5%

Note : ^M Misconceptions

Table Four: Respondents' knowledge in preventive measures for dementia

	With Demented Relatives (N = 141)	Without Demented Relatives (N = 851)	Total (N = 1002)
Playing Mahjong	70.9%	71.4%	71.1%
Taking brain nourishing supplements / vitamins / nutrition supplements ^M	22.7%	29.3%	28.2%
Frequent exercise, e.g. practising Tai-chi, Chi-kung *	73.8%	80.5%	79.3%
Continue to work or volunteer	73.0%	75.7%	75.0%
Attend to food consumption, consuming more vegetables and less greasy food	62.4%	60.9%	60.9%

Note: ^M Yet to show any evidence in preventing dementia; * Group differences