

Abstract

Decision making capacity assessment in general practice in Ireland

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Abstract

Introduction: It has been reported internationally that doctors have a limited understanding of the legal standard that applies to decision making capacity (DMC). No research on this has been conducted in Ireland to date. We sought to assess the

understanding of legal principles relating to capacity and consent among Irish general practitioners (GPs), alongside how DMC assessments are conducted.

Methods: This study utilised a cross-sectional cohort model circulating online questionnaires to Irish GPs associated with a university research network. Data were analysed using SPSS to conduct a variety of statistical tests.

Results: There were 64 participants, with 50% aged 35–44 years and 60.9% being female. Of these, 62.5% found DMC assessments time-consuming. Only 10.9% of participants felt extremely confident in their abilities; most participants (59.4%) felt 'somewhat confident' in their ability to assess DMC. Also, 90.6% of GPs routinely engaged with families when assessing capacity. GPs felt their medical training did not prepare them for DMC

assessment (undergraduate 90.6%, non-consultant hospital doctor 78.1%, GP training 65.6%). 70.3% felt guidelines relating to DMC would be helpful and 65.6% felt they needed additional training.

Discussion and Conclusions: Most GPs recognise the importance of DMC assessment, and it is not considered a complex or burdensome task. There was limited knowledge of the legal instruments relevant to DMC. GPs felt there should be extra support available to assist them with DMC assessment; specific guidelines for different categories of patients was found to be the most popular resource requested.

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