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Research papers this month

Locum doctors in general practice

There is evidence of dissatisfaction with the performance of locum doctors, but little is known about locum doctors and their experiences of working in general practice. Using a postal questionnaire, McKevitt *et al* aimed to describe the motivations and experiences of doctors providing locum cover in general practice. They conclude that those doctors who intend to continue working indefinitely as locums represent a useful resource in primary care, and the need to control the quality of such doctors should not overshadow the need to control the quality of their working environments.

Improving the management of hypertension in the elderly

In this randomized controlled trial of practice-based educational visits, Cranney *et al* aimed to establish whether an exploration of 'barriers to change', such as organizational difficulties, can enhance the effectiveness of an educational intervention designed to improve the management of hypertension in the elderly. The results determine that the effectiveness of such an intervention is significantly improved by addressing the barriers preventing practitioners from implementing the findings of research.

Do nursing home residents make greater demands on GPs?

Pell and Williams note that the number of people residing in nursing homes has increased, and that GPs receive an increased capitation fee for elderly patients in recognition of their higher consultation rate, but that there is no distinction between the elderly residing in nursing homes and those in the community. In their prospective comparative study, the authors found that nursing home residents received greater input from general practice than community residents of the same age. They conclude that consideration should be given to restructuring the medical cover for nursing home residents, resulting in a greater scope for proactive and preventive interventions and for consulting with several patients during one visit.

Training nurse practitioners for general practice

In this study, the Eros Project Team describes the education provided to trainee nurse practitioners (TNPs) and their work, compares their practise with GPs', and determines their acceptability to patients. The authors conclude that the TNPs made good diagnostic and treatment decisions early in their training, although their high level of patient transfers to GPs indicated residual uncertainty. The results also showed that the TNPs were liked by the patients and are a valuable substitute for GPs for patients wishing to have a same-day consultation. However, limited authority to prescribe and refer to secondary care reduces NP efficiency.

Experiences of training courses in evidence-based health care

With the advent of clinical governance, GPs and nurse practitioners (NPs) will need to be competent in finding, appraising, and implementing research evidence. In this study by Greenhalgh and Douglas, in-depth questionnaires were used to report the experiences of GPs and NPs in training in evidence-based health care (EBHC). From their results, the authors offer some preliminary recommendations for the organizers of EBHC courses, including offering a range of flexible training, being explicit about course content, recognizing differences in professional culture between primary and secondary care and doctors and nurses, and addressing issues of funding and accreditation at a national level.

Measuring progress towards a primary care-led NHS

The policy of having a primary care-led NHS involves both a growing emphasis on the role of primary care practitioners in the commissioning of health services and a change from hospital to primary and community settings for a range of services and procedures. In this study, Miller *et al* consider the following three questions: Does the evidence base support the changes? What is the scale of the changes that have occurred? What are the barriers to the development of a primary care-led NHS? The authors conclude that the limited shift to date towards a primary care-led NHS, alongside evidence of ambivalent attitudes of GPs towards the shift, suggest that the policy objective may not be achieved.

Second opinion behaviour among Japanese primary care patients

Using a questionnaire survey, Sato *et al* aimed to describe the sociodemographic characteristics of patients seeking second opinions, and to determine the factors related to this behaviour. The results showed that the second opinion patients who lived far from the medical school hospital felt anxiety and went to a university-affiliated hospital on the advice of anybody. The authors conclude that determining the reasons for this behaviour will require empirical studies regarding the nature of the patient's anxiety.

Emergency medical admissions in Glasgow

Blatchford *et al* observe that studies defining the underlying factors of the rise in emergency admission rates are needed. In this cohort study they aimed to determine the principal diagnoses, demographic and socioeconomic factors associated with emergency medical admissions. The results showed that the emergency admission rates are higher among the elderly, males, and deprived populations, which has implications for equitable resource distribution in the NHS.

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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS AND READERS

These notes supersede those published in June 1999

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Journal article

1. Handysides S. Morale in general practice: is change the problem or the solution? *BMJ* 1994; **308:** 32-34.

Chapter in a book

8. Bogduk N. Sources of low back pain. In: Jayson M (ed). *Lumbar spine and back pain.* 4th edn. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1992.

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