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Research papers this month

Women's perceptions of premenstrual syndrome

Reilly *et al* note that, each year, many women seek treatment for premenstrual syndrome. This qualitative study presents evidence of women's own perceptions of this problem and concludes that these constructions differ markedly from those as presented in medical textbooks and research literature, and that this may have impacted upon GPs' attitudes towards the condition. On the basis of their evidence, Reilly *et al* suggest that the provision of a wide range of treatment options, such as support groups, would be viewed by women as more appropriate than offering treatment based on evidence from traditional RCTs.

The health status and use of health care services by patients with IBS

In this study, Donker *et al* carried out structured interviews to study the health status, lifestyle, and use of health care services of patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) in order to indicate problem areas accessible for intervention strategies. The results show that there is an excess of comorbidity, psychosocial problems, use of health care services, and absence owing to disease in patients with IBS. The authors suggest that special guidelines and training of GPs to apply a more integral approach may reduce the cost of health care and may lead to a more favourable course in patients with IBS.

Supporting practice-based audit: a price to be paid for collecting data

Lough *et al* note that there has been considerable investment by health authorities in the funding of support staff whose job it is to collect data for audit purposes. The aim of this study was to assess the cost on workload of transposing data to computer software for audit purposes and retrieving data on five chronic diseases from case records. The authors conclude that the cost of collecting data varies considerably depending on which staff are chosen for the purpose, and that practices should consider carefully how best to collect data for audit in terms of cost.

What do patients want from doctors?

To describe the expectations of a large group of patients who consulted with their GPs, McKinley and Middleton carried out a content analysis of written agenda forms completed by these patients. The resulting data demonstrate that most patients go to a consultation with a particular agenda. The authors conclude that a failure to address this agenda is likely to adversely affect the outcome of many consultations.

The health of their nation: how would citizens develop England's health strategy?

Bradley *et al* note that England's first health strategy, *The Health of the Nation*, was formulated without systematic input from the citizens whose health it targeted. The aim of this study was to explore citizen's attitudes towards this health strategy and to elicit their ideas for developing it further. The conclusions drawn from this qualitative analysis were that the citizens contributed a broad range of relevant, appropriate, and innovative ideas, and that the use of focus groups to achieve this is practical and efficient.

Who is targeted for lifestyle advice?

Recent health promotion guidelines reimburse primary health care teams (PHCTs) for targeting lifestyle advice to patients at risk of cardiovascular disease. However, it is unclear whether PHCTs do target advice, who is targeted, and whether the advice is acted upon. In this questionnaire survey, Little *et al* aimed to assess which factors predict the targeting and recall of lifestyle advice. The results show that lifestyle advice for some important risk factors is not recalled, and that some patients are unaware of their unhealthy lifestyle. The authors suggest that further research is needed to assess the cost-effectiveness of advice for both sexes and different age groups.

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