Breastmilk expression, mild cognitive impairment, Ramadan, and 111 online – an ‘invisible service’

Breastmilk expression. The preterm birth rate globally is estimated to be around 10% and early access to milk can improve outcomes. Although guidance suggests breast expression should begin within the first hour of birth, most first expressions occur much later, and a recent Australian study sought to understand why. They found that, while individual philosophies on the benefits of human milk were positive, expressing in the birth suite was dictated by essential clinical and administrative tasks, and by the value that institutions placed on expressing in the first hour. Clear objectives to undertake expressing within the first hour or within the birth suite stay, the authors suggest, need to be included in policies and supported by management and team leaders.

Mild cognitive impairment. Mild cognitive impairment (MCI), which is used to describe a stage of cognitive impairment between that seen in ‘normal’ ageing and dementia, is becoming increasingly prevalent in older people. A recent systematic review explored the experiences of older adults diagnosed with MCI. Three themes were identified: perceived reality of the MCI diagnosis; emotional and psychological responses to the MCI label; coping engaged in parallel processing. Older adults, the authors conclude, are likely to have complicated and diverse emotional reactions and coping measures. Stigma, in particular, remains an especially important issue for healthcare workers to recognise and discuss in order to facilitate timely diagnosis and management.

Ramadan. Depending on the area you work in, a huge or tiny (or somewhere in-between!) proportion of your patients are likely to observe the month of Ramadan each year by fasting through daylight hours. Given that the current literature focuses on adults who fast, a team from Michigan focused instead on children through an anonymous digital survey of paediatricians. Of 273 participants, 52% had at least a moderate amount of exposure to Muslim children in their clinical practice. Most paediatricians (66%) reported that they never ask child patients or their families about fasting, and 61% rated their understanding of fasting as minimal to none. Worryingly, 52% reported feeling uncomfortable discussing fasting recommendations with their patients and their families. The authors suggest a number of ways to ‘close this gap’.

111 online – an ‘invisible service’. As part of a ‘digital first’ policy in the UK NHS in recent years, an online version of NHS 111 was introduced in 2017, bypassing the call handling staff and pushing triage work onto patients and users of this service. A recent analysis of this service drew on Susie Scott’s work on the ‘sociology of nothing’, reflecting the ‘remarkable invisibility’ of this seemingly core NHS service in the wider landscape of health care.

Confusion about nomenclature, an exceedingly crowded digital field (littered with alternative technologies and ways of accessing care) and constant change in service provision, the authors suggest, provide some cogent reasons for this invisibility.

Podcast of the month. To learn more about postcolonialism, check out this excellent series that provides a critical lens on the history of the present on West Asia and North Africa – The East is a Podcast: https://eastisapodcast.libsyn.com/

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