What Factors Are Related to Medical Students’ and Doctors’ Attitudes Towards Older Patients?

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What factors are related to medical students’ and doctors’ attitudes towards older patients?

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**Background**

Questionnaire studies have sought to identify the possible determinants of medical students’ and doctors’ attitudes towards older patients by examining relationships with a variety of factors, such as demographic; educational/training; exposure to older people; personality/cognitive; and job/career variables. This review collates and synthesises these findings.

**Methods**

**Design:** Systematic literature review

**Review question:** Which variables show a relationship with doctors’ and medical students’ self-reported attitudes towards older patients?

**Search terms:** Boolean search in title or abstract: [physicians, medical students + 26 synonyms] AND [older people +17 synonyms] AND [attitudes + 18 synonyms].

**Search strategy:** An electronic search of 10 databases was performed (ABI/Inform, ASSIA, British Nursing Index, CINAHL, Informa Health, Medline, PsycINFO, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science) through to 7 February 2017.

**Inclusion/exclusion criteria:** Studies were included if they:
- quantitatively measured and reported attitudes toward older patients in medical doctors or medical students;
- conducted correlational analyses or difference testing of scores on measure of attitudes towards older patients with any other variable;
- published in English in a peer-reviewed journal.

**Quality assessment and extraction:** Quality appraised using the STROBE checklist (von Elm et al., 2007).

**Results: Characteristics of studies**

Searches identified 2422 articles; 37 studies met the overall eligibility criteria set.

**Quality:** rated low quality (n=14); medium quality (n=18); high quality (n=5).

**Study setting:** USA (n=25); UK (n=3); Singapore (n=3); Australia (n=2); Other (n=4).

**Results: Relationships identified**

With 14 low quality studies removed from the analysis, the figure below shows a selection of variables investigated for their relationship with attitudes.

**Conclusions**

Across high and medium quality studies, positive attitudes towards older patients were related to:
- high quality personal relationships with older people,
- interest in pursuing geriatrics,
- intrinsic motivation to enter medicine (such as the desire to help others).

Negative attitudes towards older patients were related to:
- extrinsic motivation to enter medicine (such as financial rewards).

**Avenues for future research**

- Early identification of medical students who may be interested in working with older patients using questionnaire research;
- Explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for entering medicine as a factor for specialising in older patient-dominated areas of medicine;
- Explore the nature of the link between good quality personal relationships (as opposed to frequency of contact) with older people and attitudes;
- Consider geriatrics interventions which focus on personal relationships with healthy older people to improve attitudes.

**References & Acknowledgements**


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