

OP06.5

Diagnosis and management of elder abuse by family physician

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Background & Aim: Investigate the difficulties encountered by primary care physicians in diagnosing and handling elderly abuse.

Method: A survey of the practice of 266 Family physicians in France was conducted by email using a questionnaire during the fall of 2012. Statistical analysis was performed using a Chi-2 test for the comparison of two qualitative variables, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare a qualitative variable with an ordinal one.

Results: 77 physicians responded to the questionnaire. They are often faced with the phenomenon of mistreatment, including psychological abuse, of elderly people. They describe the diagnosis correctly but express management difficulties. These difficulties are due to lack of knowledge of the law and a lack of practical tools usable on a daily basis. These physicians call for better training regarding the law and clearer reporting procedures.

Conclusion: Education and training in the legislative field must be improved. This conclusion has been reached before in previous surveys in the USA and Europe since the 1970s, which leads to the question as to whether full comprehension of the magnitude of the issue exists. Perhaps the complexity of medical practice requires that an anthropological approach should be taken to identify all the facets involved.