

A Collaboration between a Private Hospital and the Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease Association on Early Detection and Holistic Services for People with Dementia

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Introduction

Approximately 60,000 of elderly population over 65 years old in Hong Kong suffer from dementia and the number will increase to 109,200 in 2020 (Access Economics, 2006). A study conducted by the Department of Health, Hong Kong (2006), found that 89% of those persons being affected by dementia in their sample did not obtain any medical diagnosis and therefore received no suitable services. Prior to the publishing of these alarming figures, the Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease Association (HKADA) has already launched the Early Detection Service (EDS) in June 2005. The EDS provides comprehensive neuropsychological assessments to elderly people who have complaints about their memory and may also experience cognitive deterioration.

Purpose of the Project

The EDS aims to provide early screening for people in the community and to establish a referral system between the Evangel Hospital, a private hospital, and the HKADA, so that persons with dementia can receive timely management. The project also aims at arousing public awareness through public educational activities on brain health and early detection of cognitive impairment.

Material & Methods

The initial assessments are conducted by experienced occupational therapists and social workers using standardized tools and procedures. Through these comprehensive assessments, including assessment on cognition, self-care, instrumental activities of daily living, psychological and social functioning skills, elderly people who are suspected to have dementia or mild cognitive impairment can be identified. These clients would then be referred for further medical investigations. With the elderly people and their families' consent, they can be referred to a private hospital or a public facility for further medical evaluation. If indicated, some clients will be arranged to have medical counseling by the volunteering doctors of HKADA. Case conferences are conducted with doctors of the private hospital on a regular basis with regard to the diagnosis and management of clients. The correlation between the results of neuropsychological tests done by HKADA and medical evaluation are examined on a regular basis.

Results

Up to December 2007, 560 elders were assessed by EDS. 72.6% of elders were identified as having varying levels of cognitive impairment; and about 45% among this group were suspected to be suffering from dementia. However, in this pilot project, only 53 elderly clients agreed to be referred to the Evangel Hospital for further medical consultation. The remaining clients chose to be waitlisted for consultation in public medical facilities under the Hospital Authority even though the waiting time may range between 12 to 18 months. A summary of their screening reports were given to these clients to show to their own doctor for reference. In the meantime, they were invited to join the cognitive enhancement activities every Saturday organized by the HKADA. In 87.6% of cases referred to the private hospital, the diagnosis made by the physicians agreed with the assessment results of the EDS. Appropriate services, including day care support, in-home training, carer support and education were offered to the elderly clients and their caregivers by the HKADA when a diagnosis of dementia has been made.

Conclusion:

The EDS could effectively identify elders at risk of dementia. A model of collaboration between a private hospital and community service unit can facilitate early diagnosis and subsequent comprehensive care and support.