

Decision-Making Capacity Assessment Education for Physicians: Current State and Future Directions

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As the number of older adults increases, more seniors are likely to experience a decline in their decision-making capacity.

- A person's capacity to make personal/financial decisions is an important component of independence.
- As the senior population increases, so does the incidence of dementia, and with it, greater numbers of individuals who will experience a decline in decision-making capacity (DMC).
- Due to longstanding relationships and familiarity with patients, family physicians (FPs) are well-positioned to determine medical stability, conduct Decision-Making Capacity Assessments (DMCAs), and formulate opinions.

OBJECTIVE

To examine the training needs of FPs regarding DMCAs and ways in which training materials, based on a DMCA Model, might be adapted for use by FPs.

METHODS

- Design
 - A scoping review of the literature
 - Qualitative research methodology: Focus groups and structured interviews
- Setting: FPs practicing in Primary Care, Day Programs, Home Living, Supportive/Assisted Living, Long Term Care, Restorative Care, Geriatric Clinics, and Geriatric Inpatient/Rehabilitation Units in the Edmonton Zone, Alberta.
- Participants: FPs self-selected
- Procedure:
 - A scoping review of the literature to examine the current status of physician education on DMCAs
 - A focus group and interviews with FPs to ascertain their educational needs in this area.

RESULTS

4 main themes in the scoping review

- Increasing saliency of DMCAs due to an aging population
- Sub-optimal DMCA training for physicians
- Inconsistent approaches to DMCA
- Tensions between autonomy and protection

Findings of the focus groups and interviews

While FPs working as independent practitioners or on inter-professional (IP) teams are motivated to engage in DMCAs and utilize the DMCA Model for those assessments, several factors impede them from conducting DMCAs, notably:

- A lack of education
- Isolation from IP teams
- Uneasiness around managing conflict with families
- Fear of liability
- Concerns regarding remuneration.

Facilitators to Conducting DMCAs

- Physicians are committed to delivering person-centred care.
- An IP team-based approach is valuable in conducting comprehensive DMCAs.
- DMCA Model tools guide the DMCA Process

Barriers to Conducting DMCAs

- Knowledge gaps regarding DMCAs
- Isolation from IP teams
- Conflicts with families
- Concerns about liability, responsibility to the patient and lack of clarity on billing.

Recommendations for Enhancing FP Education and Engagement

- Enhanced Training / Education
- Access to IP teams supports holistic & comprehensive DMCAs
- Consultative / Mentoring support would enable FPs to enhance their competencies in DMCAs and discuss complex cases with colleagues
- Appropriate remuneration is needed for services rendered

DISCUSSION

- Population aging and increases in the number of individuals with dementia will result in an increase in the demand for DMCAs.
- Aligned with the scoping review, participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that education and training are critical for enabling them to effectively and confidently conduct DMCAs.
- There is no consistent approach to conducting DMCAs.

CONCLUSION

This research project has helped to inform ways to better train and support FPs conducting DMCAs. FPs are well-positioned, with proper training, to effectively conduct DMCAs. To engage in the process, however, the barriers should be addressed.

