Medical consultation for advance directive and health care proxy

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Background
Since 2009 a new law strengthens the legal position of advance directives in Germany. As a result we observe an increasing attention for advance directives. Beside notaries, general practitioners (GPs) are the preferred contact person to help compose this important document.¹,² To date this advisory service is not being paid by the statutory health insurance. Therefore no reliable data are available concerning doctor’s advice for writing an advanced directive or health care proxy. Especially data concerning GP’s perception are missing.

Aim
The questionnaire measures frequency, length and occasion of doctor’s advice to write a proxy.

Methods
959 GPs with academic teaching practices in North-Rhine Westphalia were surveyed with a questionnaire which had been pretested with cognitive interviewing techniques. Measures reported here include:

- Frequency of doctor’s advice using a 5-point scale from “never” to “> 20 times per annum”
- Initiation by doctor vs. patient/others
- Estimated duration of counselling in minutes

Results
482 physicians answered the survey (50.3% response). The average age is 53.8 years, 70% are male, the average GP experience is 18 years in practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whom do GPs offer this advice?</th>
<th>GP’s own documents (n=482)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special patients = 337 (70%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Own advance directive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronically sick people 317 (94%)</td>
<td>Yes 45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pensioners / elders 225 (67%)</td>
<td>No 52%</td>
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<td>Start-ups 19 (6%)</td>
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<td>Motorcyclists 15 (5%)</td>
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<td>Extreme sportmen 14 (4%)</td>
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<td>Others: 53 (16%)</td>
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</table>

Discussion
This study shows a picture of the way of GPs advise for writing advance directives and health care proxies. These provisions are a relevant topic for GP’s, they document the advice in a very good way, many different material is used and GP’s with their own proxies indicate the advice more frequently. Matters that still have to be resolved are about the quality of GP’s advice and the implementation of improvement measures.

Literature

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