**Do primary care placements influence career choices?**

Amin and colleagues1 suggest that good primary care placements and/or enthusiastic GP tutor role models may encourage medical students to become GPs. Conducting an interesting audit in primary care may also be beneficial.

In October 2017, for a medical student project, we audited consecutive patients with osteoarthritis of the knee registered at an inner city general practice to see if any advice on diet/weight loss, exercise and/or local hot and cold therapies was recorded in the notes in the past two years. The audit was based on NICE guidelines2 recommending that GPs encourage such lifestyle changes “as an ongoing integral part of the management plan” of knee osteoarthritis.

The mean age of the 112 patients audited was 69 years (range 45 to 93) and most (71%, 79/112) were female. Their ethnicity (recorded in 109 patients) was white 34%, black 28%, Asian 6% and other ethnic groups 32%. Mean BMI when available (n=73) was 31 (range 20 to 52) with over half (41, 56%) classed as obese (BMI ≥30). Medical records showed that in the past two years 24 (21%) of the 112 patients were advised about diet/weight loss, 21 (19%) were advised about exercise; and one (1%) was advised about local hot and cold therapies. Recorded advice to obese and non-obese patients was broadly similar, but numbers were small.

While carrying out this audit at a computer sited at the back of the reception area, I could see the practice team cooperate together. All the members had different roles but each was integral in facilitating the long term care of patients through maintaining trust and addressing patient problems in a calm and helpful manner. Sometimes little things like receptionists remaining attentive to patient concerns helped to deal with patients who were frustrated by an element of their care. This was enough to make a difference by calming and reassuring them. I also learnt how challenging it is working as a GP both in terms of the short time frame that they have to see a patient and the amount of thought that has to go into providing care tailored to each individual’s needs. My GP tutor for the audit was always there to check up on how I was doing and gave advice on how to structure my project. I also learnt that as well as being busy GPs in their day to day job, tutors can be great teachers and researchers – they really can multitask!

Witnessing how busy GPs were, it was no surprise that only about one in five patients with knee osteoarthritis had a discussion of lifestyle changes recorded in their notes. As highlighted by Amin and colleagues, general practices have a lot of pressure from the work load, on top of the job being very difficult; and not all health promotion is recorded. However, seeing this GP practice in action (as well as being on placement at another GP practice this year) has been an inspiration. Observing the little things that GPs and other team members do to put the smiles on patients’ faces has inspired me to go that extra mile to not only work together as part of a team but also to do the little things which make a huge difference. Maybe one day I will become a GP and make that difference too.

References

1. Amin M, Chande S, Park S, Rosenthal J, Jones M. Do primary care placements influence career choice: what is the evidence? Education for primary care [internet]. 2018 Jan 25 [cited 2018 May 29]; 29 (2):64-67. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14739879.2018.1427003>. doi: 10.1080/14739879.2018.1427003.
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