

The views of older Malaysians on advanced directive and advanced care planning: a qualitative study

Abstract

The provision of optimum care for the ageing population is dependent on the understanding of their views and values on end of life issues. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted to describe views of elderly Malaysians on Advanced Care Planning (henceforth ACP) and Advanced Directives (henceforth AD), and explore factors influencing these views. Fifteen elderly subjects with ages ranging from 65 to 83 years, representing different ethnic and religious groups in Malaysia were selected for in-depth interviews guided by a questionnaire. Five core themes were extracted from the interviews: 1) Considering the future 2) Contingency plans for future illnesses 3) Attitudes towards life prolonging treatment procedures 4) Doctor-patient relationships and 5) Influence of religion on decisions related to future illness. Despite the lack of knowledge on ACP and AD, older respondents were very receptive to their concept. Although the majority agreed on the importance of planning for future medical management and having open discussion on end of life issues with their doctor, they felt it unnecessary to make a formal written AD. Most felt that the future was best left to fate or God, and none had made any contingency plan for severe future illnesses citing religion as reason for this view. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation, mechanical ventilation and dialysis were considered by most to be invasive life prolonging treatments. We suggest that doctors initiate discussions on end of life care with every older patient and their family so as to promote awareness and introduce the concept of ACP/AD to a Malaysian setting.

Keywords — Advanced care planning, advanced directive, elderly