Background: dementia and communication

- Internationally, there is concern that healthcare professionals (HCPs) do not always possess the appropriate knowledge or attitudes to care for people living with dementia (PLWD).
- As the number of PLWD increases internationally, it is important to foster education and training that leads to the development of positive attitudes amongst HCPs.

Aim:
To compare the attitudes of medical students at different stages of training in three international locations.

Methods

- Students in years 1, 3 and 5 of a UK University (Newcastle) with campuses in the UK and Malaysia (NUMed), and a Malaysian University (Malaya) were invited to participate.
- Students completed a validated Likert-scale questionnaire (Approaches to Dementia Questionnaire – ADQ) to assess their attitudes towards PLWD.¹
- The ADQ contains 19 questions which are each scored between 1 and 5 - See Figure 1 for an example question. Some items are reverse scored.
- An ordinary least squares regression model was applied to assess the influence of stage and location on sum score.

Results

- 770 students across the three sites completed the ADQ (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Newcastle University (UK)</th>
<th>Newcastle University (Malaysia)</th>
<th>University of Malaya (Malaysia)</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The mean ADQ score (71.58, max possible score 95) indicated a generally positive attitude towards PLWD
- The least squares regression analysis demonstrated that ADQ scores varied between year groups (p<0.001) and locations (p<0.001)
- Year 3 and year 5 students expressed more positive attitudes than year 1 students (p<0.001).
- Students based in the UK expressed more positive attitudes than students based in Malaysia (p<0.001)

Discussion

- The development of increasingly positive attitudes towards PLWD as medical students progress may be due to a number of possible factors:
  - Training about person-centred approaches
  - Student maturity
  - Increased awareness of socially desirable responses to ADQ
- The variance in attitudes between students based in the UK and in Malaysia may be due to different cultural expectations or to the ADQ’s orientation in “Western” values
- Qualitative methods may be more appropriate way to further investigate cultural differences
- It remains unknown how student attitudes towards PLWD translate to behaviour in clinical practice

Conclusion: medical students’ attitudes towards PLWD were generally positive across sites, although there were significant differences in attitudes between year groups and international locations

References: