



A Comparison of Medical Students' Attitudes Toward People with Dementia across Three International Locations

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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.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
People with dementia are unable to make decisions for themselves				Figure 1	

References:

1. Lintern, TC (2001). Quality in dementia care: Evaluating staff attitudes and behaviour. PhD, University of Wales.

Results

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

Table 1: Numbers of responding students	Newcastle University (UK)	Newcastle University (Malaysia)	University of Malaya (Malaysia)	All
Year 1	208	48	39	295
Year 3	102	102	11	215
Year 5	131	58	71	260
All	441	208	121	770

- 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