

Quality Improvement Project examining the ability and confidence of junior medical staff in completion of capacity assessments at a large central hospital in Glasgow

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Aims and Hypothesis

We completed a quality improvement project examining the understanding of junior medical doctors at a large central Glasgow hospital - the Glasgow Royal Infirmary - in the completion of capacity assessments. This had followed referrals to the liaison psychiatry service at this hospital indicating that some of the referring medical staff lacked confidence and ability in this area. The aim of the project is to identify barriers to effective assessment and to improve understanding around the subject.

Background

Capacity is the ability to make a decision. This ability can vary depending on a patient's condition and how it changes over time, and on the nature of the decision to be made. All adults are presumed to have capacity to decide on their own medical treatment, unless there is sufficient evidence to suggest otherwise.

A person is deemed to have capacity if they can do the following:

1. Understand information relevant to the decision in question;
2. Retain that information;
3. Use the information to make their decision; and
4. Communicate a decision. (1)

Assessment of capacity is a required skill for doctors and is a core competency for all fully registered medical practitioners. (2) This includes appropriate use of the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 when necessary. (3)

Methods

We collated a questionnaire to identify areas of strength and difficulty for junior doctors completing capacity assessments. This questionnaire was sent out in April 2021 and again in June 2021, which resulted in a total of 41 responses from a range of specialties from foundation year 1 level to specialty registrar.

Results

71% of responses came from foundation doctors (FY1 and FY2). We identified that a majority of respondents had completed a capacity assessment (87%) and a majority felt confident in performing such assessments (65%); however 49% of respondents would not be confident in documenting an assessment. 73% of respondents had completed an AWI certificate; however of note 13% of these respondents were FY1s, which is of concern given only fully registered doctors are legally permitted to complete this paperwork. 40% of respondents thought that patients need to consent to emergency treatment or did not know if they needed to. 90% of respondents reported that a proforma would be useful to guide assessment of capacity.

Conclusions

Results showed that there is a lack of clarity from some junior medical staff regarding appropriate documentation of capacity assessments and furthermore what AWI legislation can legally be used for. As an intervention we will be updating the liaison psychiatry referral to include a more detailed capacity proforma, to assist with capacity assessment when referral to liaison psychiatry is considered.

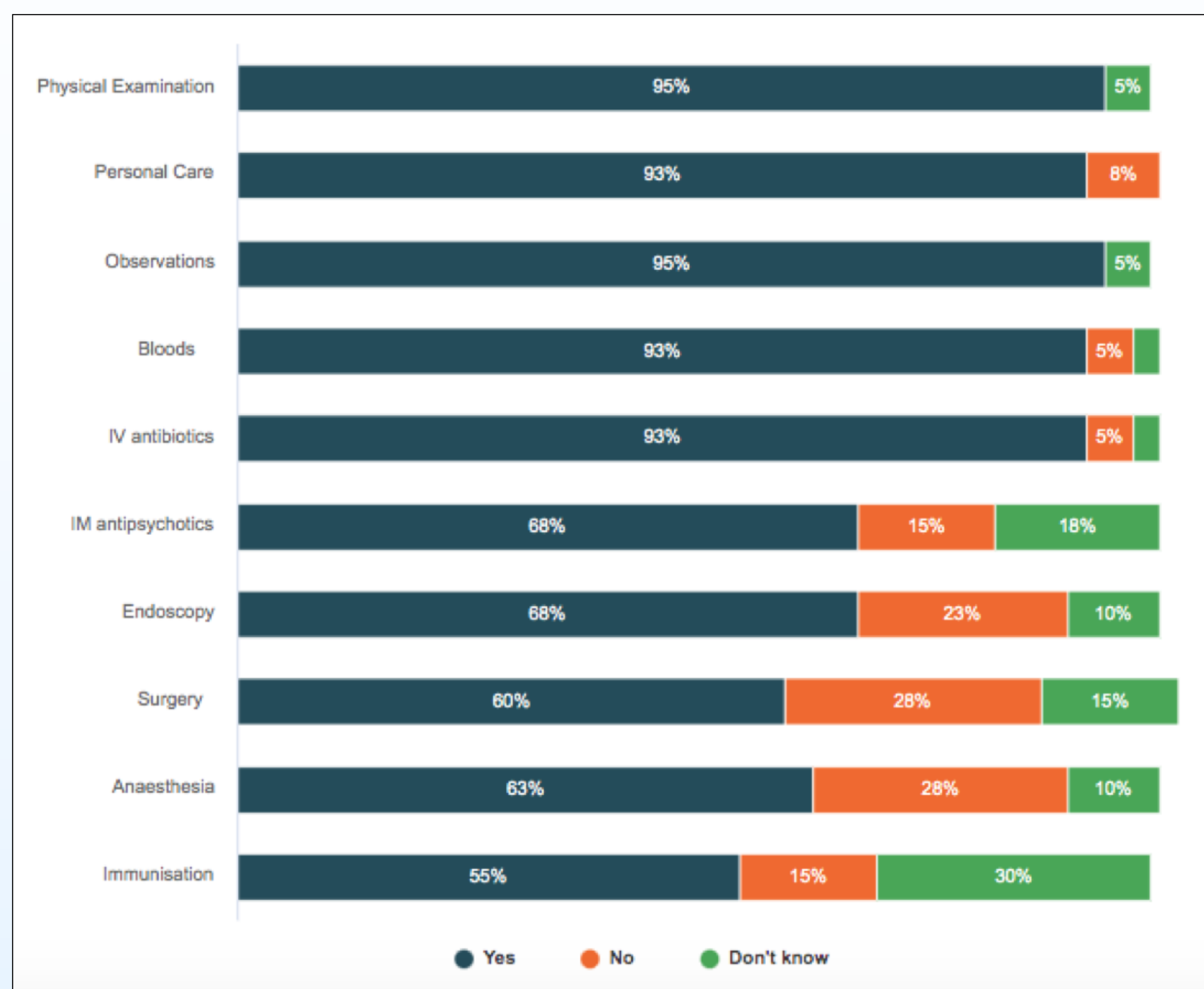


Figure 1: An AWI certificate allows the following decisions to be made- True or False?

-Has a specific decision been identified which requires the patient's attention? (e.g. intervention, treatment, discharge planning, leaving against medical advice)

-Does the patient:

- Understand the proposed treatment? Y/N
- Understand the main benefits, risks and alternatives Y/N
- Understand the consequences of each alternative? Y/N
- Use the information to make a decision? Y/N
- Retain knowledge of the decision? Y/N
- Have the means to communicate the decision? Y/N

-Has a psychiatric condition been identified which affects the patient's capacity? Y/N (If Y, permanent or temporary?)

-What cognitive assessments have been conducted?

-Is there an anticipatory care plan and/or advanced statement?

-Is there a holder of Power of Attorney/Guardianship?

-**IMPRESSION:** Do you believe this patient to have capacity to make a decision about the above treatment? Y/N (If N, is an AWI certificate indicated)

Figure 2: Proforma Draft to be included with all new referrals to Adult Mental Health Liaison Service requesting assessment of capacity

References

- (1) General Medical Council (GMC). Decision Making and Consent. Paragraphs 76 and 83. Nov 2020
- (2) Royal College of Physicians. Foundation and Internal Medicine Core Curriculum.
- (3) Adults with incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 Code of Practice (Third Edition). Health and Social Care. Oct 2010

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