

RURAL CLINICIANS' STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING OLDER PATIENTS' SEXUAL HEALTH

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Background:

Two populations that experience barriers to sexual healthcare are those living rurally, and older people aged 60+. So, what about people aged over 60 AND living in a rural area? The combination of age and rurality can make sexual healthcare access especially difficult. Fortunately, many rural clinicians do recognize the importance of sexual health to their older patients. Using findings from the SHAPE3 study (Sexual Health Ageing Perspectives and Education), we present rural primary care clinicians' (GPs and Practice Nurses) strategies and recommendations for getting sexual health on the agenda in consultations with their older patients.

Methods:

The data for this study were collected in 2024 via semi-structured interviews each around 30min in duration. 8 clinicians were interviewed (4 women, 4 men, 6 GPs and 2 PNs). Clinicians were practicing at clinics located throughout regional Victoria. Interviews were conducted by phone, Zoom or in-person and were audio recorded and transcribed. Data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach.

Results:

The clinicians interviewed discussed how they initiate sexual health conversations and offered recommendations for ways to include sexual health more consistently in routine care. 1) Broach sexual health when relevant to other conditions and medications; 2) Include sexual health during screening such as 75+ health check; 3) Consider telehealth as an option for some older patients; 4) Training for rural clinicians on older adults' sexual health would be beneficial; 5) Raise awareness and reduce stigma, so older patients can more easily bring up sexual health concerns.

Conclusion:

Many rural primary care clinicians agree that sexual health is important to older adults' quality of life, although such conversations are rarely prioritised. This study offers ways to get sexual health on the agenda as part of rural older patients' overall care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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