

Menopause Hormone Therapy: An insight into knowledge and attitudes of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in Singapore

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Abstract : Introduction: Menopause Hormone Therapy (MHT) is an effective drug indicated for the treatment of menopausal symptoms and as replacement therapy in women who undergo premature menopause. In 2020, less than 8.8% of perimenopausal Singaporean women are on hormonal therapy, as compared to the Western population, where up to 50% may be on MHT. Factors associated with MHT utilization have been studied from patient characteristics, but the impact of locally prescribing physicians resulting in low MHT utilization has yet to be evaluated. The aim of the study is to determine the level of knowledge physicians in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology specialty have and their attitudes toward MHT. We believe that knowledge of MHT is lacking and that negative attitudes towards MHT may influence its use and undermine the benefits MHT may have for women. This paper is a part of a larger study on Singaporean physicians' knowledge and attitudes towards MHT. Methods: This is a cross-sectional study intended to assess the knowledge and attitudes of physicians toward Menopausal Hormone Therapy. An anonymous questionnaire was disseminated via institutional internal circulations to optimize reach to physicians who may prescribe MHT, particularly in the fields of Gynaecology, Family Medicine and Endocrinology. Responses were completed voluntarily. Physicians had the option for each question to declare that they were 'unsure' or that the question was 'beyond their expertise'. 21 knowledge questions tested factual recall on indications, contraindications, and risks of MHT. The remaining 6 questions were clinical scenarios crafted with the intention of testing specific principles related to the use of MHT. These questions received face validation from experts in the field. 198 responses were collected, 79 of which were from physicians in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology specialty. The data will be statistically analyzed to investigate areas that can be improved to increase the overall benefits of MHT for the Singaporean population. Results: Preliminary results show that the prevailing factors that limit Singaporean gynecologists and obstetricians from prescribing MHT are a lack of knowledge of MHT and a lack of confidence in prescribing MHT. Risks and indications of MHT were not well known by many physicians, with the majority of the questions having more than 25% incorrect and 'unsure' as their reply. The clinical scenario questions revealed significant shortcomings in knowledge on how to navigate real-life challenges in MHT use, with 2 of 6 questions with more than 50% incorrect or 'beyond their expertise' as their reply. The portion of the questionnaire that investigated the attitudes of physicians showed that though a large majority believed MHT to be an effective drug, only 40.5% were confident in prescribing it. Conclusion: Physicians in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology specialty lack knowledge and confidence in MHT. Therefore, it is imperative to formulate solutions on both the individual and institutional levels to fill these gaps and ensure that MHT is used appropriately and prescribed to the patients who need it.

Keywords : menopause, menopause hormone therapy, physician factors, obstetrics and gynecology, menopausal symptoms, Singapore

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