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Doctors Communication Skills – Doctors and Elderly Patients Perspective

A Polish-Norwegian Research Project PRACTA

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Demographic changes: an increased need for proper GP – senior relationship

- An increase in lifespan is connected to the increased risk of disease, age-related conditions and consequently - increased need for healthcare.
  - 30-35% of patients from the 60-69 age group seek for medical services 7 times or more per year [*SHARE, 2013*].

- Doctors express their competencies mainly through the provision of medical help. However, the ability to develop a therapeutic relationship with a patient has no less an impact on the healthcare outcomes.

[*DiMatteo, 1998*].

- Relationship-centeredness in primary care results in higher satisfaction, better adherence and maintenance of behavioural change, as well as physical and mental health.

[*Williams, Haskard & DiMatteo, 2007*].

**Doctors – elderly patients relationship:
a crusial issue in modern primary health care.**

Aims of the study

To explore differences in general practitioners (GPs) and their older patients' ratings of GPs *communication skills* **and** to investigate whether these ratings and GPs work satisfaction are related.

H1: GPs rate their communication skills higher than patients.

H2: There is a positive correlation between these ratings and GPs' work satisfaction.
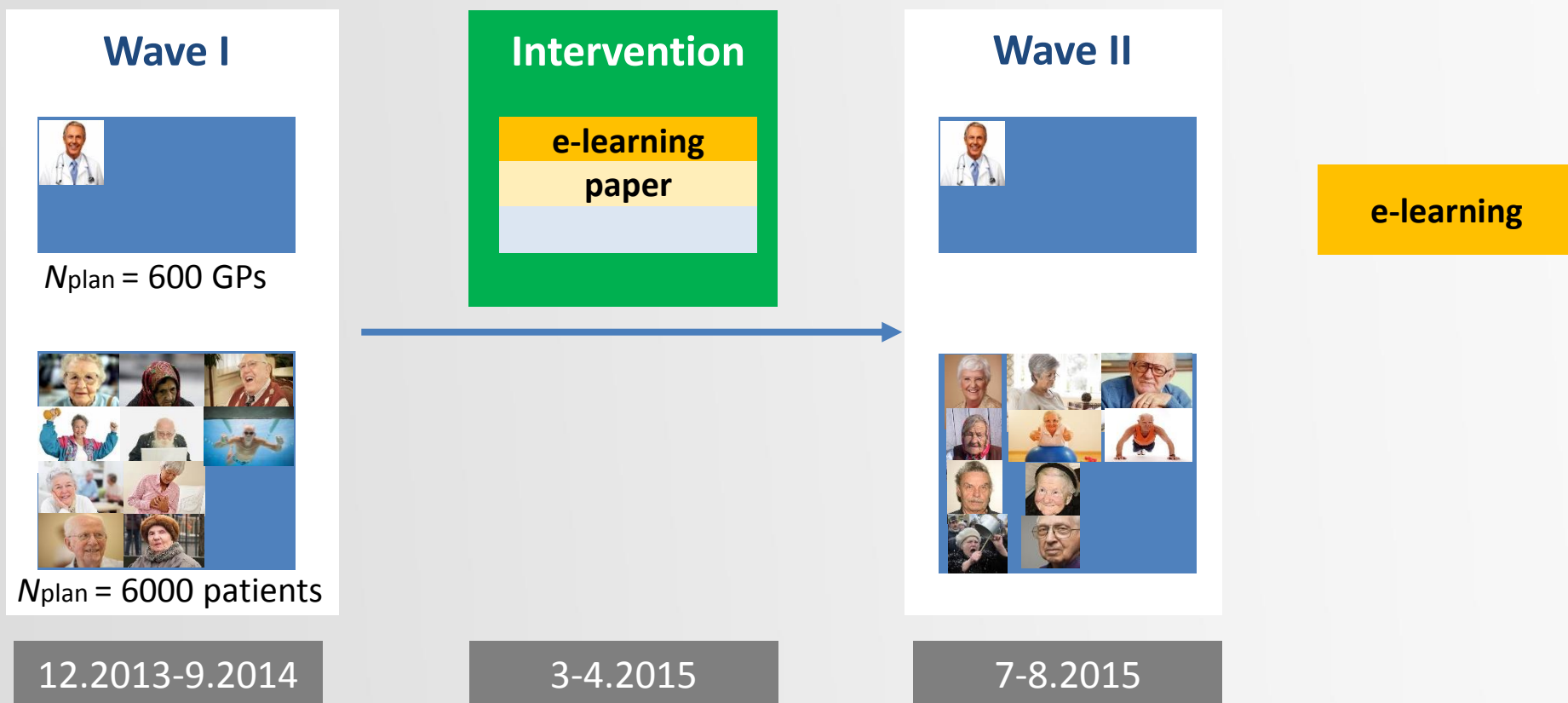
The PRACTA Project
– where it takes place?

No. of Primary Health Care Centers participating in the PRACTA study
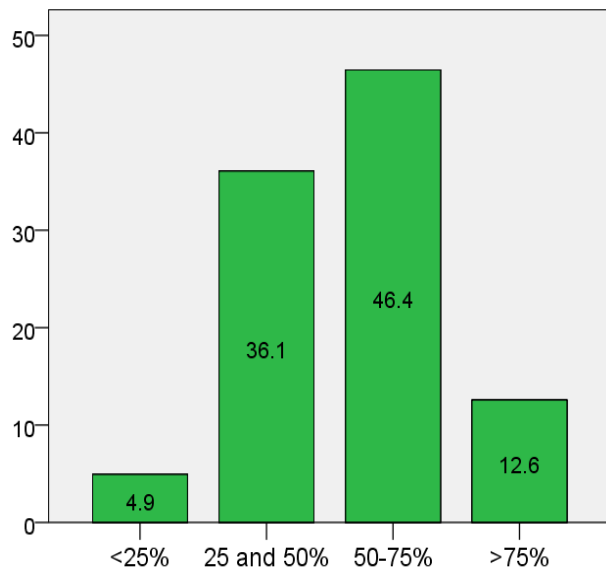
55 (45% of 122 invited)

19 (13% of 148 invited)

The PRACTA Project – methodology

Wave I

N_{plan} = 600 GPs

N_{plan} = 6000 patients

12.2013-9.2014

Intervention

e-learning

paper

3-4.2015

Wave II

7-8.2015

e-learning

Participants of the present study

General Practitioners (N= 183)

- **Age**: M= 47.9 , SD= 12.1
- **Gender**: 65%F : 35%M
- **Job seniority**: M=22.1 , SD=12.7
- **% of 65+ patients last year:**

Patients (N = 389)

- **Age**: M= 70.2, SD=8.32
- **Gender**: 59%F : 41%M
- **Education**:
  - Primary: 10%
  - Voccational or secondary: 67%
  - Higher: 23%
- **Subjective health status:**
  - *Mdn* = 3 (*average*), *Range*: 1-5.
- **Main objectives of the visit**:
  - Referral to specialist: 21%
  - Seeking advice: 16%
  - Treatment: 10%
  - Documents (signature): 8%

Measures

General Practitioners

- **Doctors' Communication Skills Scale - version for GPs**
  - 26 items (7 point response format)

    e.g. *During visits of my elderly patients (65+) I...*

    ... greet them in a kind manner.

    ... listen to them carefully.

    ... encourage them to participate in making decisions.

    ... notice their feelings and accept them.

- **Doctors' Work Satisfaction Scale**
  - 5 items (7 point response format)

    e.g. *My work is close to the ideal in many ways; I'm satisfied with my job.*
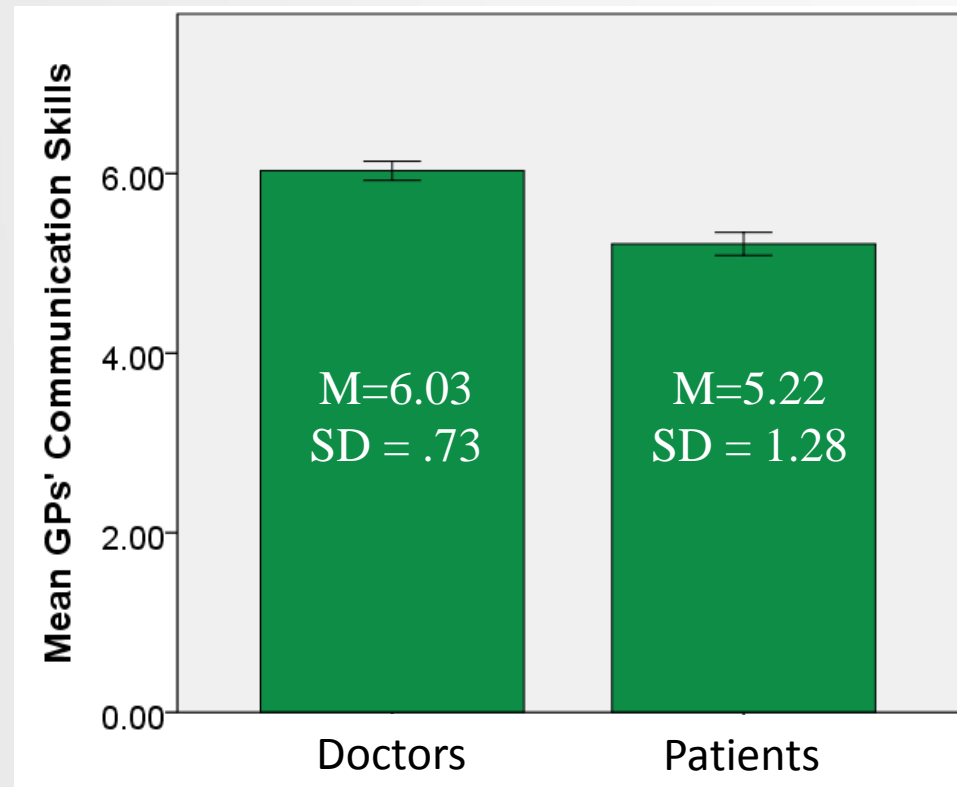
Patients

- **Doctors' Communication Skills Scale - version for patients**
  - 26 items (7 point response format)

    e.g. *During this visit the doctor ...*

    ... greeted me in a kind manner.

    ... listened to me carefully.

    ... encouraged me to participate in making decisions.

    ... noticed my feelings and accepted them

Results (H1)

H1: GPs rate their communication skills higher than patients.

→ **confirmed**

$F(1, 549.2) = 93.10$, $p < .001$, $\omega = .31$.

M=6.03
SD = .73

M=5.22
SD = 1.28

Results (H1)

On the level of particular items of the GPs' Communication Skills Scale:

- All but two evaluations of the skills differed significantly between doctors and patients, all ps < .001

Doctors (Mdn=5) did not differ significantly from the patients (Mdn=5) in the evaluation of „***encouraging to ask questions***", U = 32909, z = -1.49, ns, r = -.06

Doctors (Mdn = 6) did not differ significantly from patients (Mdn=5) in the evaluation of „***providing as much time as needed for each part of the visit (e.g. interview, thinking)***", U = 34232, z = -.76, ns, r = .03

Results (H2)

H2: **There is a positive correlation between GP's self-ratings of the communication skills and their work satisfaction.**

→ **confirmed**

$r = .26$, $p < .001$.

Highest correlations were found between work satisfaction and:

- *„listening to patients carefully"*, $\tau=.34$, $p<.001$
- *„showing understanding for their problems"*, $\tau=.29$, $p<.001$
- *„answering all their questions"*, $\tau=.26$, $p<.001$
- *„noticing their feelings and accept them"*, $\tau=.25$, $p<.001$

Conclusions

- These early results show inconsistency in how the quality of communication is seen by doctors and elderly patients.
  - How adequatly doctors evaluate their own communication skills?

- Trainings in interpersonal communication skills for doctors may not only have a positive effect for patients and their satisfaction with consults but also for doctors work satisfaction
  - Increasing actual practical communication competences (performance) not only awarness of what good communication is (knowladge) seems crucial

**It seems that the doctors <u>know</u> what they should be doing,
<u>think</u> they are doing it,
but they are not doing it totally right.**

Thank you