

The assessment of psychosocial problems and disability in COPD patients in primary care

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Background

COPD patients are increasingly being cared for by primary care nurses.

It is uncertain whether nurse-led care improves COPD patient's psychosocial well-being and disability.

We investigated :

1. The frequency that nurses performed psychosocial and disability assessments compared with other key tasks
2. The impact of accredited post-registration COPD education and practice-based respiratory clinics on performance of psychosocial and disability assessments.

Methods

Lead COPD nurses, based at 500 randomly selected UK general practices, were invited to participate.

Nurses self-reported :

1. The frequency they performed key tasks (scored on a four-point Likert-type scale)
2. Their COPD-related training
3. Whether they ran a designated respiratory clinic.

Data were collected between February and June 2006.

The relationship between the frequency these tasks were performed and the level of training and presence of a respiratory clinic was tested using the chi-square test.

Results

- 368 nurses completed the COPD questionnaire (74%)
- Of these, 349 ran follow-up consultations (95%)
- Subjective assessments were performed less frequently than objective tasks.
- 51% of nurses (95%CI 45-56%) reported 'always' or 'often' assessing psychosocial problems
- 48% (95%CI 42-53%) reported 'always' or 'often' assessing disability using a validated scale (see fig. 1).
- The underperformance of subjective tasks was related to a lack of accredited post-registration COPD education (table 1) and whether the practice ran a designated respiratory clinic (table 2).

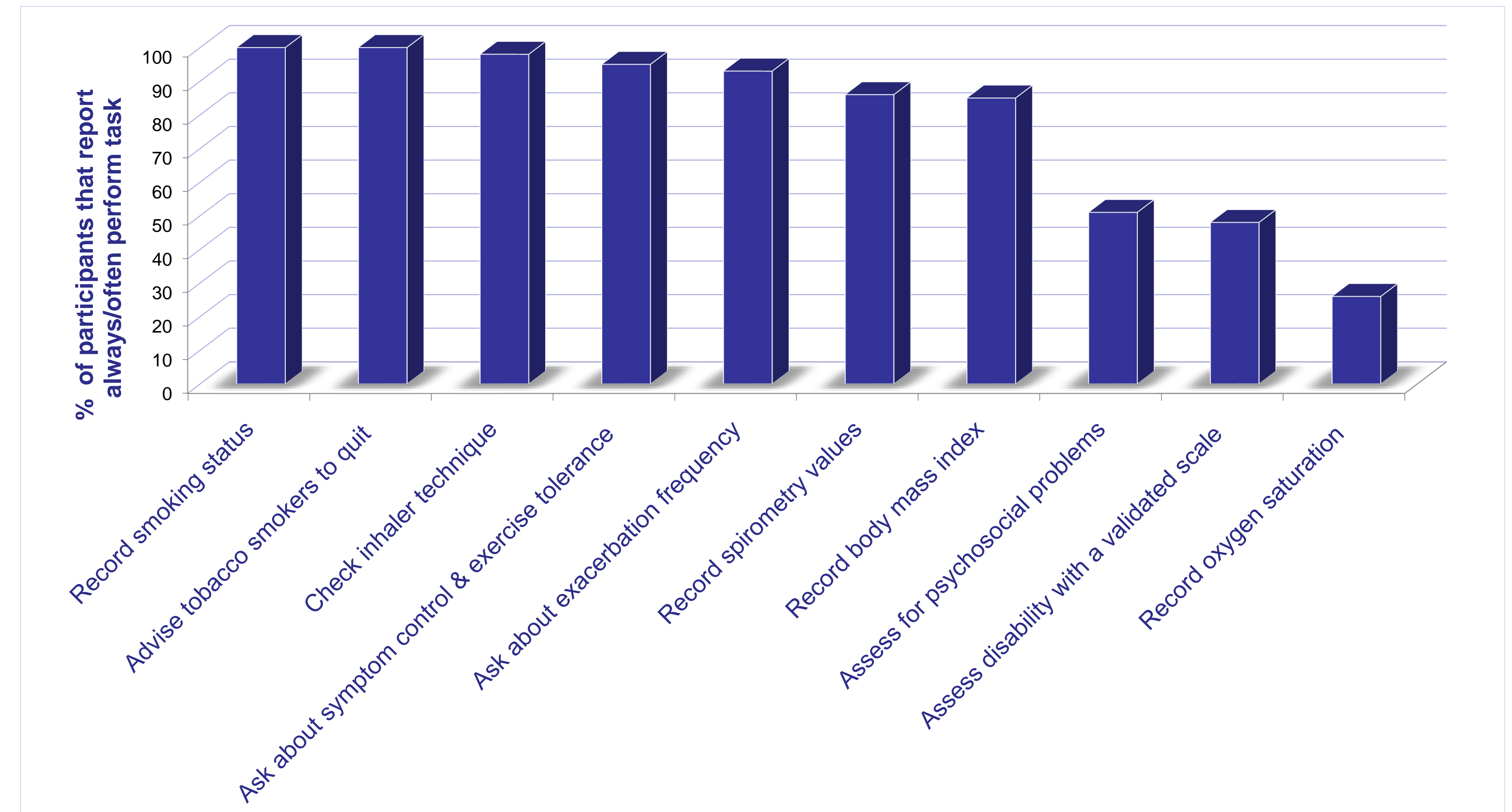


Figure 1. Proportion of nurses who reported 'always' or 'often' performing key components of follow-up consultations

Table 1: Frequency that nurses 'always' or 'often' performed tasks by level COPD education

Recommended Task	Nurse had undertaken accredited COPD education		
	Yes (N=118)	No (N=228)	P value
Assessing psychosocial problems	74 (63%;CI:54-71)	101 (44%;CI:38-51)	0.001
Assessing disability with a validated scale	80 (68%;CI:59-76)	84 (37%;CI:31-43)	<0.001

Table 2: Frequency that nurses 'always' or 'often' performed tasks by consultation setting

Recommended Task	Setting of consultation		
	Designated respiratory clinic (N=150)	Generic appointment (N=151)	P value
Assessing psychosocial problems	84 (56%;CI:48-64)	67 (44%;CI:36-52)	0.028
Assessing disability with a validated scale	80 (53%;CI:45-61)	60 (40%;CI: 32-48)	0.009

Conclusion

A high proportion of nurses did not assess psychosocial needs or disability. This was performed less frequently in generic appointments, perhaps due to time constraints., and by nurses without accredited training (who may not feel competent to perform such tasks).

In order to raise the profile of these aspects of care, updates of the GMS Contract should encompass the assessment of patient's psychosocial status and quality of life. Appropriate education of the health care professionals who undertake these assessments is also key.