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A STUDY ON THE KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES ON EXAMINATION OF PATIENTS FOR DRUNKENNESS AMONG DOCTORS INVOLVED IN SUCH EXAMINATIONS

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Introduction

Driving after consumption of alcohol is an offence in Sri Lanka according to the Motor Traffic Act. When a police officer suspects that the driver of a motor vehicle on highway has consumed alcohol, he may request such person to submit himself immediately to breath test for alcohol or to an examination by a government medical officer. Hence, knowledge and attitude of doctors who perform examination for drunkenness plays a crucial role in administration of justice.

Objective

To study about knowledge and attitudes on examination of patients for drunkenness among doctors with different levels of expertise/ experience who are engaging in such examinations.

Study design

A cross sectional descriptive study was performed using an interviewer-administered questionnaire, on doctors who engage in examination of people for drunkenness. The knowledge was assessed by 8 comprehensive questions on the procedures and subjects scoring $\geq 75\%$ were considered as having 'satisfactory' knowledge on the matter.

Results

Out of the 306 doctors participated in the study, 246 (80%) were ordinary medical officers while there were 29 (9.5%) postgraduate trainees in Forensic Medicine and 30 (10%) specialists. One third ($n=105$, 34%) believed that their knowledge on examination procedure is poor. Procedure to be followed in the finger nose test was correctly identified by a majority (95%) while only 35% were aware of the procedure to be followed in one leg stand test. There was a significant association ($p=0.000$) of the postgraduate qualifications in Forensic Medicine with satisfactory knowledge in procedure.

Conclusions

Ordinary medical officers in Sri Lanka perform majority of the medico legal examinations for drunkenness and the study revealed that their knowledge is poor. This can adversely affect the results of the tests in examination of drunk and hence can lead to wrongful convictions. Thus, it is high time to fill the gaps in their knowledge through special professional training programs and by introduction of a guideline.