

Physical Barriers Encountered Within Hospitals by an Elderly Population in Accessing Healthcare: A Study Conducted at The North Colombo Teaching Hospital, Ragama, Sri Lanka.

T.N. Edussuriya¹, K.D.M.R.H. Dissanayake², V.S.T.H. Fernando³, W.S. Fernando⁴, W.N.N. Fernando⁵, N. Perera⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

As the population of Sri Lanka rapidly ages, the issue of equity and equality in accessing health care facilities for elderly is important. There are physical barriers for accessibility in healthcare facilities for them which can be corrected effortlessly in local context.

Objective- To identify difficulties and physical barriers encountered by an elderly population in accessing healthcare at the North Colombo Teaching Hospital, Ragama, Sri Lanka.

Descriptive study was carried out among 341 persons over the age of 60 years visiting the outpatient department and clinics. Interviewer administered questionnaire was administered and data was analysed using SPSS version 22.

Demographic data showed mean age as 67 years of which 56% were males. 51% were accompanied by family member and 36% relied on another helper. 51% of them had mobility impairment and 25% had vision impairment. 28% had used assistive devices ranging from glasses (26.8%), crutches (22.3%) to wheel chairs (3.2%). Of persons using mobility assistive equipment, 85% thought that manoeuvrability was limited and could not reach the second floor (41%) without assistance. They complained of not noticing the information desk (33%), poor visibility of boards (25%), difficulties in identifying correct room (20%) and inadequate seating (50%). 1/4th of elderly thought facility to access washrooms was inadequate and were not disabled friendly. (45%)

Elderly population has numerous difficulties and physical barriers while accessing health care facilities. Improvements in finding directions, manoeuvrability and physical facilities will help to provide equal and equitable health care services for the neediest people of the society.