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The attitudes of general practitioners in private practice towards Adult Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

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Abstract

Although ADHD has recently become more recognised as a disorder that persists into adulthood, the diagnosis and prevalence of the disorder remains controversial. ADHD is one of the most frequently diagnosed disorders in childhood, but is not commonly diagnosed or treated in adulthood. As general practitioners are often the initial point of contact for patients concerned that they may suffer from a mental health disorder, the perceptions and practices that general practitioners follow regarding ADHD are of key importance. The study aimed to provide insight into the attitudes held by general practitioners toward adult ADHD and to explore their practices when diagnosing and treating the disorder. The study adopted a qualitative research design incorporating individual interviews conducted with eight general practitioners in South Africa. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data and derive themes relating to the attitudes toward adult ADHD and the practices followed. Results indicate that general practitioners in South Africa acknowledge ADHD as a disorder that persists into adulthood, which can affect the functioning of patients and requires effective treatment. However, general practitioners consider ADHD difficult to diagnose on a day-to-day basis as a result of several factors including time constraints, the subjective nature of the diagnosis as well as a lack of training and knowledge of the disorder. These findings indicate that adult ADHD is mostly self-diagnosed by patients who then approach their general practitioners for help. Thus, the current study highlights the importance of public awareness of the disorder to enable patients to approach their general practitioners and to raise their concerns of the possibility of having ADHD.