

Protein calorie under nutrition in hospitalized elderly patients

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The proportion of the Sri Lankan population aged 60 and over has grown from 7% in 1981 to 10% in 2001. Decreased food intake and a sedentary lifestyle of the elderly increase their risk for malnutrition. Therefore elderly people are more prone to hospitalization due to the decline of body functions and vulnerability to chronic and infectious diseases. Malnutrition is a widespread, but largely unrecognized problem in hospitals and it is a contributing factor to the increasing morbidity and mortality of elderly. The present study was aimed to assess the prevalence of malnutrition in elderly patients admitted to the hospital and to study the relationship between their present nutritional status and length of hospital stay.

Hundred and ten patients (60 females and 50 males) over 60 years of age and free from chronic diseases were recruited from the General Medical Wards in Kuliypitiya Base Hospital. Nutritional status was assessed by anthropometric measurements, Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) scores and dietary assessment (recall along with observations). Interview schedule was used to collect background information.

More than half (57.3%, n=63) were between 60-70 years and 42.7% (n=47) were over 70 years ($p<0.0001$). All selected anthropometric measurements (weight, height, waist and hip circumferences and mid upper arm and calf circumferences) decreased significantly with increasing degree of undernourishment (ANOVA; $p<0.05$). Of the 110 subjects who underwent the Mini Nutritional Assessment, 96.3% were malnourished or at risk to be malnourished. Patients, who were malnourished, belonged to poor income category and who had dementia, had longer hospital stay compared to their better counterparts. Dietary assessment results revealed that intake of macronutrients and micronutrients were lower than WHO recommendation for elderly. Lesser dietary intake of both macro and micronutrients was found with advancing age, increasing degree of malnutrition, and with dementia conditions when risk factors for poor nutrition of elderly (impairments, illnesses, physical activity level and appetite) were adjusted.

In conclusion, a substantial proportion of the older patients of the Kuliypitiya Base Hospital was undernourished or at risk to be undernourished. Undernourished and patients in poor income category had higher length of hospital stay. Nutrient intakes of the elderly patients were lower than the WHO recommended values.

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