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The Awareness Level of Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome among the Primary Care Medical Staff

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Objectives: Despite obstructive sleep apnea syndrome (OSAS) is a prevalent condition, it is under-recognized and underestimated by many workers in the medical field. We aimed to assess the awareness level of primary care medical staff towards OSAS during daily practice in our hospital.

Methods: A prospective study was conducted in January 2019 at Dr Suat Günsel University of Kyrenia Hospital which included the medical staff. The participants were asked to answer a 24-question survey regarding to risk factors, symptoms and complications of OSAS. One sleep expert reviewed and approved the checklist questionnaire. The demographic data of the participants, their background about OSAS, their recognition of the symptoms, diagnostic tests and consequences including cardiovascular, neurobehavioral and urologic diseases were investigated.

Results: Data was available from 137 participants of whom 38.2% were males and 61.8% were females. The median age was 25. Only 1.9% of them had never heard about OSAS. The most common source of information about OSAS was during their medical or paramedical education and training (61.7%). Only 12.5% of the participants attended lectures or conferences about sleep disorders during their postgraduate training or practice. Of the participants, only 38.3% of the participants identified male gender as a risk factor. More than half of the the participants identified cigarette (80.8%) alcohol (59.5%) and obesity (82.8%) as nonstructural risk factors for OSAS. Only 40.6 of the participants had idea that enlarged neck circumference (men: >43 cm; women: >37 cm) was a characteristic physical finding. The recognition level of the symptoms were as follows: Snoring (74.2%), respiratory breaks (86.7%), daytime somnolence (57.4%), daytime fatigue (33.8%) and morning headache (66.1%). Of the participants 77.9% identified the need for polysomnography for the evaluation of patients. The recognition level of serious consequences were as follows; Motor vehicle accidents (51.4%), hypertension (28%), diabetes (19%), cardiac arrhythmia (62.5%), stroke (43%), dementia (26%), nocturia (17%) and sexual dysfunction (37%).

Conclusion: According to these results, although most of medical staff have some idea about common symptoms and risks, they do not have enough knowledge about possible consequences. It is necessary to develop education programs to increase OSAS awareness among practicing primary care staff during their patient encounters.

Keywords: Awareness, sleep disorders, obstructive sleep apnea