

Discussing Sexual Health with Your Doctor

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Objective: Research about patient-physician communication about sexual health suggests it is quite difficult and often omitted when the patients are older adults. The objective of this project was to assess MAHEC Family Health Center's elder patients' attitudes and desires about discussing sexual health with their doctors.

Methods: Patients \geq 65 years old participated in a voluntary, anonymous, paper-pencil, cross-sectional survey; 80 surveys were analyzed; descriptive statistics are presented.

Results: Only 21.3% reported discussion about sexual health with their doctor since turning 65 years old. Among the sexually active, 64.3% desired discussion; among those not sexually active currently, 23.7% desired discussion. Most (83.4%) expressed moderate to extreme comfort with such discussions. In all, 41.3% preferred their doctor initiate the conversation. Few (12.7%) said they would be embarrassed; half of the sexually active patients said they would be relieved. Opportunities included the Annual Wellness Visit and when diagnosing or treating a medical condition likely to be associated with sexual side effects.

Conclusion: While generalizability is limited given the small sample, many of our patients, especially those sexually active, desire to discuss sexual health. Doctors need to initiate the discussions thereby establishing a comfortable environment for patients to address their needs and concerns.

Key words: Sexual health; Patient-physician communication; Elders