

ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to understand patients' health beliefs, knowledge and perception of – in particular modifiable – cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors to help in the planning of CVD prevention programmes in Malaysia.

Setting and Participants: 21 male and 25 female patients aged 21-84 years were randomly selected from a multi-ethnic, urban primary care clinic, at University Malaya Medical Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

Methods: Mixed methods were used: a structured interview guide with both open and closed-ended questions and rank-ordering methods.

Results: Physicians, printed and digital media were regarded as reliable sources of health information. Knowledge and perception of obesity and systemic hypertension were inadequate as they were not regarded as a disease by a considerable minority of subjects, and only noted by few respondents as being associated with myocardial infarction. Obesity was not placed great importance as a risk factor for hypertension and diabetes mellitus. There was inadequate knowledge of dietary sources of cholesterol. Knowledge about complications of tobacco use and about smoking cessation techniques was insufficient. Forty-one percent of interviewees reported doing 4 hours or more of moderate or strenuous exercise per week.

Conclusion: Public policy should focus on providing the community with skills how to choose credible health information from printed and digital media. Preventive programmes should focus on improving the public's awareness of the significance of obesity and hypertension as cardiovascular risk factors, further improve awareness of physical activity, emphasize the wide range of complications of tobacco use, and improve the community's knowledge of effective tobacco cessation programmes.