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Experience of Western Herbal Medicine practitioners in supporting brain health in mid-life and older patients: a qualitative research study

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Introduction
Dementia is a public health and social care priority. Western herbal medicine (WHM) can play a role in multi-domain healthcare strategies for prevention of dementia in at risk population and support healthy brain ageing in at-risk populations.

Aim
To explore the experience of WMH practitioners working with age-related brain health issues and modifiable risk factors in mid-life and elderly patients.

Methods
- Recruitment of three WHM practitioners using purposive sampling and a set of inclusion criteria.
- Use of semi-structured interviews to explore their herbal and therapeutic management approach and gauge their views on the preventative role of WHM in the assay group.
- Simple thematic analysis of practitioners’ narratives from taped interview transcripts

Results
Four themes emerged around:
- Treatment of impaired memory and cognitive function alongside metabolic and cardiovascular conditions implicated in dementia pathology
- Use of wide range of herbs for individualised and extemporaneous compounding.
- Dietary and lifestyle recommendations an integral part of the treatment
- Challenges of working with the target patient group
- Role of WHM in managing brain health in aging population

Discussion
- First of its kind study into current real-life application of WHM in supporting cognitive and vascular brain health in mid-life and older patients

...because we give a rounded treatment as well, not just herbs, we can support the patient in different ways. I think it’s the care and support they are also worried about and people do deteriorate. Because we have time to spend with patients, that is quite an important factor to be in the loop of it.

Small exploratory study limitations identified.

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