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Lack of knowledge and availability of diagnostic equipment could hinder the diagnosis of sarcopenia and its management

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Rationale

Sarcopenia is an emerging clinical challenge in an ageing population and is associated with serious negative health outcomes. Healthcare professionals play a key role in diagnosing and managing sarcopenia.

Aim

This study aimed to assess the **current state of knowledge** about the concept of sarcopenia, and the **current practice** on the diagnostic strategy and management of sarcopenia in a diverse cohort of Dutch healthcare professionals attending a lecture cycle on sarcopenia.

Methods

- The Sarcopenia Road Show comprised of lectures and workshops in one session on the pathophysiology of sarcopenia, influencing factors and respective interventions at multiple locations in the Netherlands in 2015.
- Healthcare professionals (n=223, table 1) were asked to complete a questionnaire before (current knowledge and clinical practice), directly after (intentions) and five months after attendance (level of implementation).
- Questions contained the current state of knowledge on the concept of sarcopenia, diagnostic strategy and management of sarcopenia including interventions and collaboration.

Results

- Before attendance, 69.7% stated to know the concept of sarcopenia, 82.6% had treated patients with suspected sarcopenia and 21.4% indicated to know how to diagnose sarcopenia; 47.5% used their clinical view to diagnose.
- If objective measures were used, a third used at least one of the proposed diagnostic measures. Five months after attendance, 70% used at least one diagnostic measure (table 2).
- Before attendance, the combined consultation of a PT/ET and a dietitian was reported by one out of five healthcare professionals and this had not changed five months after attendance (table 2).
- Bottlenecks during implementation of the diagnostic strategy were experienced by 67.1%; lack of awareness among other healthcare professionals, acquisition of equipment and time constraints to perform the diagnostic measures were reported most often.

Conclusion

The concept of sarcopenia is familiar to most Dutch healthcare professionals but application in practice is hampered: diagnostic strategy mostly by lack of knowledge, availability of equipment and time constraints; for the management of sarcopenia, collaboration should be improved.

Table 1. Occupation and working affiliation of healthcare professionals

Current occupation	
Medical group	55.2%
Allied health – PT/ET	37.2%
Allied health – Dietitian	7.6%
Working affiliation	
Primary care	45.3%
Nursing homes	22.9%
Hospitals	31.8%

Table 2. Diagnostic measures and management of sarcopenia

		Before	Directly after	Five months after
Diagnostic measures	Muscle mass	9.0%	29.1%	20.9%
	Handgrip strength	33.9%	79.5%	67.4%
	Gait speed	19.5%	75.9%	72.1%
Management	No PT/ET or dietitian	36.4%	5.0%	28.3%
	Consulted PT/ET	10.5%	4.1%	21.7%
	Consulted dietitian	32.7%	34.4%	30.0%
	Consulted PT/ET & dietitian	20.5%	56.6%	20.0%

PT; physiotherapist, ET exercise therapist