

Barriers and Unmet Needs in Obstructive Sleep Apnea Management in China: A Qualitative Study from Physician and Patient Perspectives



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BACKGROUND

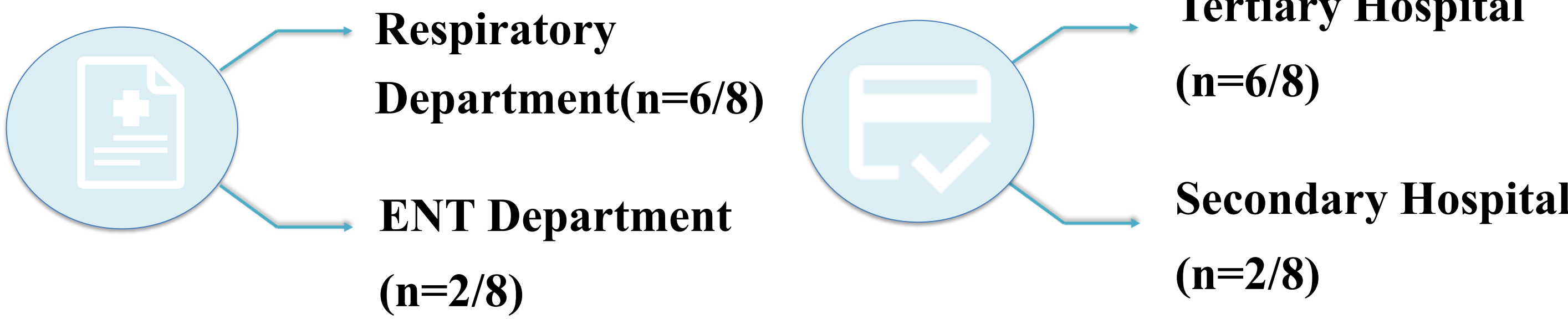
- Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is a highly prevalent sleep-related breathing disorder carrying a substantial disease burden.
- The current status of OSA management in China remains unclear, with limited real-world evidence on the barriers patients and physicians face.

OBJECTIVE

- To identify barriers and unmet needs in current OSA diagnosis and treatment from both the physician and the patient perspectives, using qualitative interview study.

RESULTS

8 physicians were interviewed



Physicians' perspective

- Five treatment modalities for OSA were identified in clinical practice:
 - i) Non-invasive ventilation (n=7/8)
 - ii) Surgery (n=6/8)
 - iii) Lifestyle intervention (n=6/8)
 - iv) Pharmacotherapy (n=5/8)
 - v) Oral appliance (n=4/8)
- Major challenges spanned four aspects in Physicians' perspective:

Insufficient patient awareness

Most individuals regard the condition merely as habitual snoring and do not seek medical care proactively.

Disparities in OSA-related resources allocation

Uneven allocation of medical resources, particularly regarding the sleep monitoring equipment across primary and tertiary hospitals.

Inadequate clinical prioritization among physicians

Some physicians have insufficient understanding of OSA; non-specialist clinicians often fail to consider OSA when encountering relevant clinical symptoms.

The absence of multi-disciplinary collaboration mechanisms

OSA is characterized by diverse factors and clinical presentations. Therefore, joint development of diagnostic and treatment regimens by multiple departments.

METHODS

Study Design

One-on-one online semi-structured interviews based on interview outlines developed with iterative clinical experts consulting.

Study Population (n=16)

Participants were recruited from eight hospitals across Mainland China including eight physicians with OSA clinical management experience and eight adult patients with diagnosed OSA.

Statistical analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to identify and categorize qualitative contexts.

8 adult patients were interviewed



Patients' perspective

- Four treatment modalities for OSA were identified in Patients' treatment:
 - i) Lifestyle intervention (n=7/8)
 - ii) Non-invasive ventilation (n=5/8)
 - iii) Pharmacotherapy (n=4/8)
 - iv) Oral appliance (n=2/8)
- Major challenges spanned four aspects in Patients' perspective:

Limited disease awareness

Patients are unaware of the existence of OSA and lack knowledge regarding the long-term adverse physical consequences of nocturnal hypoxia.

Lack of comprehensive treatment guidance

Common therapeutic devices such as non-invasive ventilators involve complicated operation, and patients lack formal guidance after device acquisition.

Cumbersome medical processes

Patients need to consult multiple departments, while clear referral pathways are absent; registration and waiting consume substantial amounts of time.

Out-of-pocket economic burden

The majority of available therapeutic options for OSA are excluded from health insurance reimbursement, resulting in substantial out-of-pocket financial burdens for patients.

Both perspectives expressed expectations across three priority areas:

- Scaling up evidence-informed public awareness campaigns and health literacy interventions;
- Developing and implementing more convenient, accessible, and integrated care pathways to enhance patient engagement and treatment adherence;
- Promoting health insurance coverage and financial support mechanisms to meaningfully reduce out-of-pocket expenditures.

CONCLUSIONS

- OSA management in China faces challenges covering low public awareness, disparities in resources allocation, and potential economic burden. Addressing these issues through promoting disease education, OSA-related devices equipment, and insurance coverage is important.

References:

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[2] Chang JL, Goldberg AN, Alt JA, Mohammed A, et al. International Consensus Statement on Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Int Forum Allergy Rhinol. 2023 Jul;13(7):1061-1482.