

# Integrating Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA) into primary care in Malaysia: A strategic approach to early dementia detection

Jayandri Senara Kottearachchi, Leeynesh Sooriyapiragasam, Dhanya Ravintharan

Faculty of Medical Sciences, Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed Malaysia) No. 1 Jalan Sarjana 1 Kota Ilmu, EduCity@Iskandar, 79200 Johor, Malaysia

Track: Diseases of Aging

Theme: Prevention, Screening and Early Detection

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Malaysia will be an ageing nation by 2030, with >15% of the population aged >60 years old. This paradigm shift is anticipated to upsurge the number of people living with dementia (PLWD). The Malaysian National Dementia Action Plan (2023–2030) targets early detection by endorsing yearly screening for those at high risk of dementia. However, early diagnosis is hindered by specialists' shortage in Malaysia, with less than 80 geriatricians currently practicing (2023), below the recommended ratio. Other barriers include poor awareness, stigma, inadequate training and low screening rates in clinical settings. **Objective:** This review aims to identify prevailing gaps in early dementia detection in Malaysia and explore strategies from other health systems' policies that could be adapted locally. **Materials and Methods:** A narrative synthesis was conducted using literature published between 2015 and 2025 to explore barriers and enable dementia screening in primary care. A rapid review of eleven peer reviewed articles indexed in PubMed was performed using search terms related to ("dementia" AND "cognitive screening" AND "primary care"). **Results:** The Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) and Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA) are widely used but limited in populations with low education and language barriers. The 5-Cog Paradigm is a tool assessing picture-based memory, motor cognitive risk, and paper-matching that offers a quick and effortless alternative, which has been successfully implemented in developed countries, improving accessibility and geriatric screening. **Conclusion:** A complete and organized pathway for early dementia detection is achieved when cognitive screening is incorporated through Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA). Some approaches to implementing this include training healthcare providers in CGA, embedding cognitive assessments into existing NCD clinics, utilizing digital health tools for comprehensive documentation and extending outreach through primary care. By overcoming training constraints, these actions serve national objectives and allow for prompt intervention among the elderly.

Keywords: Dementia, Cognitive Screening, Primary Care, Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment, Malaysia