Patient perceptions of laxative therapy in the Geriatric Evaluation and Management Service (GEMS) RBWH. “A moving issue”

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Introduction and Aim
The management of constipation in the elderly can be challenging due to its multifactorial etiology. Clinical pharmacy review indicated that elderly patients admitted to the GEMS ward frequently refuse laxative therapy.

The aim of this audit was to investigate patient perceptions of prescribed laxative treatment and identify gaps in the current medical practice of laxative treatment in the GEMS unit at Royal Brisbane and Women’s hospital (RBWH).

Methods
A prospective study was conducted of patients who refused charted laxatives in the GEMS unit at RBWH over a 10-week period in 2020. Patient medical progress notes and inpatient medication charts were accessed. Documentation of each laxative class refusal was recorded as an individual event. Recorded event data included laxative class, number of refusals and associated refusal reason.

Conclusions
A majority of patients had risk factors that could contribute to constipation. Patients would benefit from education around laxative therapy and perceptions of laxative treatment. A multidisciplinary approach should be adapted to ensure laxative treatment is individualised and regularly reviewed for appropriateness. Ongoing laxative therapy review and communication within the multidisciplinary team could reduce refusal rates and improve patient confidence and compliance to laxative treatment.