HOW PHYSICIANS' AND PATIENTS' CHARACTERISTICS AFFECT THE LENGTH OF PATIENTS' VISIT IN THE HEMATO-ONCOLOGICAL CLINIC?

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Introduction

The relationship between doctors and their patients has received philosophical, sociological and literary attention throughout history.

In this study we focused on the length of time doctors spend with their patients.

According to a recent publication, doctors estimated spending on average 13 to 16 minutes each time but no published studies quantified the actual duration of visits.

Numerous studies in the field of social psychology confirmed that as most of us implicitly assume, people tend to spend more time with people that resemble them.

Aims

Quantify length of patients' visits.

Determine whether patients' and doctors' characteristics affect the visit time.

Methods

The study was conducted at the Institute of Hematology at Rabin Medical Center, an Israeli 1300 bed tertiary medical center.

Since 2005 a customer-time management software (Q-Flow®) entered routine use at our institute. This software records the length of patients-doctors' meetings and provides patients' demographic data. With this software we collected data on all consecutive visits in the hemato-oncology clinics during 2017.

Additional data was collected from electronic medical records.

Results

Demographic characteristics - Patient's & Physician's Age, Patient's Gender & Country of Origin

In 2017, 22,516 visits of 3314 patients that were seen by 22 doctors.

The median age of the patients was 68 years (range: 17 to 99) and male to female ratio was 1/1.07, among them 83% (n=1722) were married.

Patients were classified according to their country of origin: Israel, 1734 pts. (52%); Western countries, 187 pts. (6%); Eastern European countries, 615 pts. (19%); Arab countries, 738 pts. (22%); or others, 40 pts. (1%).

Hematologic Diagnosis

The most common hematological diagnosis was lymphoma (38%, 1203) followed by plasma cell dyscrasia (16%, 498), myeloproliferative neoplasms (12%, 394) and chronic lymphocytic leukemia (10%, 316).

Length of visit – crude & 25%-75%

The median length of patients'- doctors' visit was 12.3 minutes (range 3.7 to 36), and although the variance in length of visits was relatively narrow, it differed significantly according to patients' and doctors' characteristics.

Variables that affect visits' length

Fellows had the longest visits 14.9 min, in comparison to young and older seniors (13.2 min & 10.9 min respectively).

Compared to male doctors, female doctors had longer visits (P= 0.029). Yet, both patients' and doctors' gender predicted visits' length.

Country of origin also had minor, yet significant impact on length of visits, being longer for patients born in Israel of Jewish descent compared to patients born in Israel of Arab descent (P= 0.002) and shorter compared to patients of Eastern European descent (P = 0.019).

Conversely, patients' age and family status had no impact on visits' length.

Summary

The median patients' visit length is 11.8 (range: 3.8 to 27.3) minutes. Professional seniority is inversely correlated with visit length. Female doctors spend more time with their patients. Patients' visit is longer in winter time.