Duration of Patient Encounters in Ophthalmology Clinics Based on Physician and Patient Gender

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BACKGROUND

- The number of females in ophthalmology and medicine is increasing.¹
  - In 1968, 14.3% of medical students enrolled at Canadian faculties of medicine were female.
  - Since 1995, enrollment rate of females has been > 50%.
- Men and women practice medicine differently.
- Female physicians are more likely to:
  - Adhere to clinical guidelines
  - Practice preventative medicine
  - Use patient-centered communication
  - Provide more psychosocial counseling²⁻⁵
- Female physicians have improved patient outcomes:**
  - Elderly hospitalized patients treated by female internists have lower mortality and readmissions compared with those cared for by male internists.⁶
- Female ophthalmologists in the US bill for significantly fewer clinical encounters and collected **\$0.58 for every dollar** collected by male ophthalmologists.⁷
- Yet, there is **no difference in hours worked/week** between female and male Canadian ophthalmologists.⁸
  - Could this be due to:
    - Differences in allocated surgical time?
    - More time spent on non-clinical activities such as research or teaching?
    - Females spending a longer duration of time per clinical encounter?

OBJECTIVES

- To determine:
  - Do female ophthalmologists spend a longer amount of time per patient encounter compared to male ophthalmologists?
  - Do ophthalmologists spend a longer amount of time with male patients or female patients?

METHODS

- This study was approved by the Western University institutional ethics review board.
- 22 ophthalmologists in Ontario were timed for each patient encounter by an independent observer.
  - 10 female ophthalmologists
  - 12 male ophthalmologists
- An independent observer gathered data by timing approximately 100 patient encounters for each participating physician.
- Statistical analysis (T-test) was performed using Graphpad Prism 8.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Duration of all patient encounters grouped by physician gender. Female ophthalmologists spent a significantly longer time with patients (8.0 minutes +/- 4.3) compared to male ophthalmologists (7.2 minutes +/- 4.2), *** $P < 0.0001$.

Figure 2. Duration of new consults. Male and female ophthalmologists spent approximately the same time seeing patients in consultation (9.2 minutes +/- 4.4 vs. 9.4 minutes +/- 5.1).

Figure 3. Duration of cataract consults. There was no significant difference in the time male and female physicians spent seeing cataract consults (9.3 minutes +/- 4.7 vs. 10.9 minutes +/- 4.6).

Figure 4. Duration of follow-up appointments. Male physicians were significantly faster at seeing follow ups (6.6 minutes +/- 3.5) compared to female physicians (7.8 minutes +/- 3.9), *** $P < 0.0001$.

RESULTS CONT'D

Figure 5. Duration of all patient encounters grouped by patient gender. Duration of all patient encounters were approximately equal when categorized by male patients and female patients (7.4 minutes +/- 4.2 vs. 7.4 minutes +/- 4.3)

DISCUSSION

- Female ophthalmologists spend significantly more time during each patient encounter compared to their male counterparts** when seeing patients in follow up, but not in consultation.
  - Ophthalmology practices typically consist of a large volume of follow-up patients.
  - Spending a longer time per appointment results in a reduction in patient volume seen by female ophthalmologists given the same time frame.
- Patient gender does not play a factor in determining the duration of an ophthalmology clinic appointment.**
- It is unknown if longer patient encounters results in improved patient satisfaction or patient outcomes in the ophthalmology setting. Future studies involving patient surveys can address:
  - Patient satisfaction
  - Confidence in surgeon
  - Patient understanding of their diagnosis
  - Patient compliance with prescribed medications

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