

Determinants of Consultation Time at a Family Medicine Center

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Abstract : Aim of the study: To explore duration and determinants of consultation time at a family medicine center. Methodology: This study was conducted at the Family Medicine Center in Ahad Rafidah City, at the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia. It was conducted on the working days of March 2013. Trained nurses helped in filling in the checklist. A total of 459 patients were included. A checklist was designed and used in this study. It included patient's age, sex, diagnosis, type of visit, referral and its type, psychological problems and additional work-up. In addition, number of daily bookings, physician's experience and consultation time. Results: More than half of patients (58.39%) had less than 10 minutes' consultation (Mean+SD: 12.73+9.22 minutes). Patients treated by physicians with shortest experience (i.e., ≤ 5 years) had the longest consultation time while those who were treated with physicians with the longest experience (i.e., > 10 years) had the shortest consultation time (13.94 \pm 10.99 versus 10.79 \pm 7.28, $p=0.011$). Regarding patients' diagnosis, those with chronic diseases had the longest consultation time ($p<0.001$). Patients who did not need referral had significantly shorter consultation time compared with those who had routine or urgent referral (11.91 \pm 8.42, 14.60 \pm 9.03 and 22.42 \pm 14.81 minutes, respectively, $p<0.001$). Patients with associated psychological problems needed significantly longer consultation time than those without associated psychological problems (20.06 \pm 13.32 versus 12.45 \pm 8.93, $p<0.001$). Conclusions: The average length of consultation time at Ahad Rafidah Family Medicine Center is approximately 13 minutes. Less-experienced physicians tend to spend longer consultation times with patients. Referred patients, those with psychological problems, those with chronic diseases tend to have longer consultation time. Recommendations: Family physicians should be encouraged to keep their optimal consultation time. Booking an adequate number of patients per shift would allow the family physician to provide enough consultation time for each patient.

Keywords : consultation, quality, medicine, clinics

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