

Exploratory study of frequent attenders in General Practice to better understand why patients seek help.

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Introduction

Frequent attenders (defined as the top 10% of health care users making ≥ 10 visits per year)¹ account for 30-50% of GP consultations.² This has significant resource implications

Aim

To understand the characteristics of frequent attenders (≥ 18 years) at an outer London General Practice (list 5,876; deprivation index 5th decile) and reasons for attending.

Methods

- A retrospective case note review was conducted using SystmOne, of people attending on ≥ 10 occasions to see a health professional between March 2022 and February 2023.
- Data were extracted by hand; age, gender, reason and type of consultation, diagnoses, referrals, Charlson Comorbidity Index (CCI), mortality at one year.
- Patient notes for ≥ 30 contacts were reviewed by a senior GP.

Results

- 544 people (9.3%) attended ≥ 10 appointments (inclusive of GP's, nurse and HCA appointments).
 - Of these, thirty five interacted with a GP ≥ 30 occasions (Group 1), eight ≥ 40 occasions (group 2) and five ≥ 50 occasions (group 3).
 - These forty eight patients accounted for 882 appointments – 29% face to face and 71% by telephone.
- Frequency increased with age and CCI.
- Patients in group 3 underwent more investigations (6.0/6.0/10.0).
- There was no difference in mean numbers of clinicians seen (6.4/7.1/7.4) or referrals (5.0/4.0/5.0) between the three groups.
- Frequent attenders tended to fall into two groups:
 1. People with chronic diseases, typically associated with anxiety and complex needs.
 2. People with ongoing mental health conditions.
- Coding was challenging due to complexity.



Average	Group 1 ≥ 30 consultations	Group 2 ≥ 40 consultations	Group 3 ≥ 50 consultations
Age (years)	70	69.6	74.6
Gender	27 female 8 male	6 female 2 male	4 female 1 male
Charlson Comorbidity Index (predicts 10-year survival in patients with multiple comorbidities—higher score +higher predicted mortality)	4.7	5.5	5
No of Dr's seen over year	6.4	7.1	7.4
Investigations (includes urine dip, blood tests, imaging)	6	6	10
Referrals (referral to other service in community or secondary or tertiary care)	5	4	5
Total number of telephone consultations → F2F consultation (2 appointments in the same day)	16	16	14

Conclusion

Frequent attenders presented due to their medical complexity or mental health disorders rather than medically unexplained symptoms. This represents a significant workload. Frequent attenders see different doctors and are often referred. Most interactions with a GP are understandable.

References

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