How Accurate are Patients in Estimating Physician Interaction Time?
Kedia, R; Dargan, C; Dasa, V

Introduction: Much of the data used in epidemiological and clinical studies is obtained primarily through self-report questionnaires, patient interviews, or previous medical records. Previous studies have shown that patient recall may vary greatly depending on their satisfaction with the physician and the quality of communication Objective: To investigate how patient’s perception of interaction time varies based on patient satisfaction.

Methods: Patients were recruited as part of a prospective observational study at an outpatient orthopedic clinic that presented with knee osteoarthritis symptoms. Data was gathered regarding socioeconomic information, x-ray grades, feedback surveys, and health-status instrument surveys. X-ray grades were scored using the Kellen-Lawrence Grading Scale (KL) and Ahlback Radiographic Grading Scale (AR). The feedback survey assessed for physician-patient interaction time, pain levels, satisfaction, and understanding. The health-status instrument surveys included the OKS, WOMAC, KOOS, and SF-12 Health Survey.

Results: Patient’s report of perceived interaction time with the physician was approximately 18 minutes, while actual interaction time was about 11 minutes (p<0.0001). Increased pain levels, worse severity of diagnosis, and older patients were all associated with higher perceived time (p<0.05). Pain levels, severity of diagnosis, age, and gender were not significantly associated with an increase in actual physician-patient interaction time (p>0.05).

Conclusion: Given the discrepancy in perceived interaction time compared to actual time, these results raise questions about the reliability and accuracy of patient’s recall ability. Inaccurate recall could lead to miscommunication between patients and physicians, and therefore cause incorrect diagnoses and changes in treatment regimens. Other variables such as pain, severity of diagnosis, and age can also play a significant influence on patient recall ability. If patients use interaction time as a measure of physician quality this could impact physician satisfaction scores, which may in the future influence physician reimbursements.