



Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia

PATIENT PERCEPTIONS OF REFERRALS TO FAMILY PHYSICIAN IN GEORGIA

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Patients have less motivation to address the primary care

- One of the most important components of the assessment of effectiveness of medical care is the patient's referral rate to family physician. It aims to analyze how often the population applies to the primary health care institutions;
- primary healthcare system in the Republic of Georgia has failed to develop under the standards that have been applicable in many developed countries;
- The patient's referral rate to family physician is 3.6 in Georgia (7.5 in European countries);
- which is due to the fact that patients have less motivation to address the primary care physician for prevention. Patients prefer hospital services;
- It is obvious that the low development of primary care and family physician institute has a negative impact on the health status of the population and health care costs.

The Research Goal

- The purpose of the work is to study the cause of a low rate of the patient's referral to family physician in Georgia.

Methodology

- An analytic cross-sectional study was conducted.
- Participants were 300 patients from different cities and regions of Georgia. Ten large Family Medicine Centers of Georgia were selected for research.
- The criteria for involvement in the survey were local patients who voluntarily expressed the desire to participate in the study.
- The study instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire.
- 20 registered family physicians who worked in the Family Medicine Centers have agreed to participate in the survey. Within the qualitative study, in-depth interviews of family physicians were conducted.

Results of Family Physicians Interview

- About 60% of respondents served 10 to 15 patients per day;
- 55% of family physicians have revealed that patients often address them only for the referral to the specialists;
- Only 15% of family physicians have provided preventive consultations periodically and 50% - in case of need only;
- The salary of 90% of family physicians was below 700 GEL (\$300);
- The majority (65%) think that their remuneration is low;
- 70% of family physicians think that their remuneration is not adequate to their work and that they work more than they are paid;
- 60% of family physicians do not have nurses. Considering that a nurse plays a significant role in providing services, her absence in a family medicine team negatively affects the quality of service and therefore the patient's satisfaction.
- 45% of family physicians think that the employer does not care about their maintenance and professional growth as a human resource.

Results of Family Physicians Interview

- 35% of respondents think that the employers don't try to listen to their problems and do not respond to them in time.
- Continuous professional education of medical personnel plays a great role in medicine. 50% of family physicians think that they are more or less able to improve professionally, but 35% do not have the opportunity to do so.
- 35% of respondents cannot participate in educational programs for family physicians.
- Continuous professional education in Georgia is not mandatory, and trainings and educational programs are mostly paid. Family physicians do not have the opportunity to get trainings and improve their education, and the employer does not care about it. This negatively affects the professional growth and qualification of the physicians.
- 50% of family physicians are familiar with medical news through medical journals and articles, and 45% are more or less familiar.
- It is noteworthy that 30% of the respondents do not follow the news on the Internet

Results of Family Physicians Interview

	N	%
Age		
21-30	1	5
31-40	4	20
41-50	9	45
51-60	4	20
Over 60 years old	2	10
Working experience		
Less than 5 years	2	10
5-10 years	14	70
More than 10 years	4	20
The number of beneficiaries under the family physician's supervision		
Less than 1000	1	5
From 1000 to 2000	11	55
More than 2000	8	40

Results of Family Physicians Interview

The number of patient's received by a family physician during a day	N	%
Less than 10	1	5
From 10 to 15	12	60
More than 15	7	35
The patients address the family physicians often only to receive a referral to a specialist		
Yes	3	15
No	5	25
More or less	11	55
Not sure	1	5

Results of Family Physicians Interview

Remuneration of the interviewed family physicians	N	%
300-500 GEL	5	25
501-700 GEL	13	65
701-900 GEL	2	10
More than 901 GEL	0	0
Assessment of their remuneration by the interviewed physicians		
Low remuneration	13	65
Satisfactory remuneration	6	30
Good remuneration	1	5
Adequacy of remuneration as assessed by the interviewed family physicians		
Works more than paid	14	70
Pay is adequate to the work	1	5
Works somehow less than paid	5	25

Results of Family Physicians Interview

	N	%
Do you provide preventive consultations to your patients?		
Sometimes	3	15
Only in case of need	10	50
I have no time for such consultations	7	35
Whether family physicians have nurses?		
Yes	8	40
No	12	60
Does the employer seek professional growth of a family physician?		
Yes	3	15
No	9	45
More or less	5	25
Not sure	3	15
Does the employee always listen and responds to your problems?		
Yes	4	20
No	7	35
More or less	7	35
Not sure	2	10

Results of Family Physicians Interview

Do you have career development, professional improvement opportunity?	N	%
Yes	0	0
No	7	35
More or less	10	50
Not sure	3	15
Do you attend educational programs for family physicians?		
Yes	3	15
No	7	35
More or less	6	30
Not sure	4	25
Do you follow the medical news through medical journals and articles?		
Yes	10	50
No	0	0
More or less	9	45
Not sure	1	5
Do you get updated guidelines via the Internet?		
Yes	7	35
No	6	30
More or less	7	35
Not sure	0	0

Results of Family Physicians Interview

- 35% of respondents address both a family physician and a specialist-physician.
- 42% of respondents visit the family physician once a year or do not visit at all.
- Most respondents (49%) spend less than 10 minutes with family physician.
- More than 30% of respondents agree that getting medical services with family physician is comfortable.
- The majority of respondents believe that the family physician institute needs some changes

Results of Patient Interview

	N	%
To whom will you mainly address in case of health problems?		
Family physician	60	20
Specialist-physician	90	30
Sometimes a family physician, sometimes to as specialist-physician	105	35
Self-medicate	45	15
How often do you address to a family physician during a year?		
Once or not at all	126	42
2-5	72	24
6-8	42	14
9-10	54	18
11 and more	6	2
Do you have confidence in family physician's qualification?		
Yes	101	34
No	91	30
Not sure	108	36

Results of Patient Interview

How long lasts your visit to a family physician in average?		
Less than 10 minutes	147	49
10-20 minutes	87	29
20-30 minutes	36	12
More than 30 minutes	30	10
Do you wait for appointment by a family physician for a long time?		
Strongly disagree	27	9
Disagree	33	11
Agree more or less	93	31
Agree	132	44
Strongly agree	15	5
Getting medical services with family physician is comfortable		
Strongly disagree	69	23
Disagree	24	8
Agree more or less	90	30
Agree	81	27
Strongly agree	36	12
How would you rate the family physician's institute?		
Positively	90	30

Conclusion & Recommendations

The low rate of the patient's referral to family physician is due to lack of confidence in the quality of medical care. This is mainly caused by low qualifications of family physicians, their low pay.

The state and employers are less likely to support professional growth of family physicians. Accordingly, family physicians do not have the opportunity to develop and grow professionally. It is noteworthy that the continuous professional education in the country is not mandatory.

Primary healthcare reform will not be implemented without properly educated family physician/nurse.

The level of professional training shall be raised. In this view, there are family medicine training centers in the country, where the family physician/nurse are trained. However, most of them are paid trainings and often are not affordable.

Conclusion & Recommendations

With the support of donor organizations, the state shall ensure development of the necessary capacities of primary healthcare human resources of the appropriate qualification throughout the country.

The state should support continuous medical education of family physicians.

In order to promote the development of the family physician's institute, it is necessary to ensure the normal remuneration of primary care medical staff.

It is advisable to introduce the combined methods of pay for the primary health care, which means funding other than remuneration method (targeted remuneration, and so on).

Special attention shall be attached to the methods of incentive remuneration of physicians to carry out prophylactic measures for beneficiaries.

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