

Illness behavior of German General Practitioners – a survey

S. Schulz¹, F. Einsle², N. Schneider¹, J. Gensichen¹

¹ Institute of General Practice and Family Medicine, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, School of Medicine Jena University Hospital, Germany

² SRH University of Applied Sciences for Health Gera, Germany

Introduction/aim of study

- international guidelines recommend that physicians should be registered with a General Practitioner (GP), avoid informal consultation and self-treatment (BMA 2010)
- Reviews show that adherence to these guideline recommendations is heterogenic (Kay 2008, Montgomery 2011)
- in Germany systematic studies to the topic are missing (Schulz 2014)

The aim of our study was to analyze the illness behavior of primary care physicians in Germany regarding registration with a GP, informal consultation and self-treatment.

Methods

- observational study with postal survey in spring 2014
- convenient sample of 1000 General Practitioners in central Germany
- Comprehensive questionnaire with questions to chronic conditions, registration with a General Practitioner, formal/informal consultation, self-diagnostic and self-therapy
- Informal consultation, self-diagnostic and self-therapy were assessed with a 4-point Likert-scale (applicable - not applicable)
- descriptive analyses
- Ethical approval by the Institutional Review Board of the JUH (No. 4058-04/14).

Results

- N = 285 (30.3%) were included in the analysis with a mean age of 53.6 Years (SD = 8.94). Main part (64.9%) were female, 64.9% worked in single practice and 8.8% worked as salaried employees.
- Only 19% (n = 54) were registered with a GP, with statistical association to working as entrepreneur and in single practice. There was a significant correlation to reporting at least one chronic disease.
- 56% (n = 160) indicated that it is (slightly) applicable for them to conduct informal consultation in case of acute illness.

Chronic conditions	%	Absolute count
Cardiovascular disease	27	76
Disease of back, hip or joint	21	61
Diabetes, other metabolic disease	12	34
Respiratory disease	6	16
Cancer disease	5	14
Neurologic disease	3	9
Others	19	53

Table 1 Entities of chronic conditions, reclined on the CIRS (Linn 1968)

Self-diagnostic And Self-Therapy	Applicable	slightly applicable	slightly not applicable	not applicable
If I'm acute ill, then I induce diagnostic by myself (n = 276)	N (%) 188 (68)	N (%) 65 (24)	N (%) 17 (6)	N (%) 6 (2)
therapy myself (n = 277)	168 (60)	94 (34)	10 (4)	5 (2)

Table 2 Descriptive analysis of self-diagnostic and self-therapy in case of acute illness

- N = 164 (57.2%) reported to have at least one chronic condition.
- In case of acute illness 92% state it (slightly) applicable to induce diagnostic by themselves and 90% to therapy themselves.

Discussion

According to international guidelines our data indicate a suboptimal illness behavior of German General Practitioners. This may have impact on the medical supply of their patients. Further research is necessary to build a base for development of German guidelines and educational strategies.

Literature

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