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PREVENTIVE HEALTH IN A CHANGING WORLD

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSULT DURATION OF A SUBSIDIZED SPECIALIST OUTPATIENT CLINIC

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Background

This study aimed to identify factors associated with consult duration (CD) of a subsidized Specialist Outpatient Clinic (SOC) in a Singapore tertiary hospital. CD, expressed in minutes, was the total time spent by a junior doctor (JD) attending to a patient visit.

Methods

An observation study was performed to characterize key consultation activities at a team-based approach SOC. Patient load in a session was shared among four JDs with a senior doctor (SD) reviewing their respective cases. Activities and variables tracked by four observers over ten days included interactions between patients and doctors, documentation, SD reviewing cases, waiting for SD, medical students training, any operation listing, any investigation ordering, presence of any caregiver, visit types (new case / follow-up) and day of the week. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis, Spearman's rho) were performed to identify significant factors associated with CD.

Results

602 data points were collected through observation of 17 clinic sessions. Factors significantly associated with CD included visit type, day of the week, number of available SDs, had operation listing and had investigation ordering. New cases had mean CD of 20.8 compared to follow-ups of 15.7. Longest mean CD was on Friday (18.4) and shortest on Tuesday (13.3). The mean CD was reduced by 26.0% or 40.3% with an additional SD or no SD review was needed. Cases having operation listings and investigation ordering took 8.1 and 3.2 longer respectively.

Conclusion

The findings from this study could be used to design appointment slots which reduce patients' consult wait time.