

How seeing the same GP helps your health

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Patients are more likely to raise a health problem with a doctor they've seen over time and have built-up a relationship with, new research has revealed. The insight comes as an increasing number of patients struggle to see the same GP.

Researchers from the University of Bristol will share their findings with health practitioners and researchers at the South West Society for Academic Primary Care (SW SAPC) meeting today [07 March].

Seeing the same GP is thought to be important in ensuring quality of patient care, as the doctor will have better knowledge of the patient's history, medications, and health-related behaviours and attitudes.

However, a quarter of patients find it difficult to see the doctor of their choice most of the time due to a combination of factors. Namely, a reduction in [doctors'](#) working hours, an increase in part-time working, a focus on access and rapid appointments in the 2004 GP contract, and organisational changes in out-of-hours care.

Previous studies have quantified the numbers and types of [problems](#) that are raised in GP consultations, but there is little evidence about the effect of increasing depth of patient-doctor relationships on the content of these interactions.

To shed light on this, researchers collected data from 22 practices in the Bristol area, recording consultations between 190 patients and 30 GPs.

Researchers then looked at whether consultation length and the number of problems and issues raised were affected by patient-doctor continuity.

Analysis showed that almost a third of patients had a 'deep' [relationship](#) with their GP, which in turn encouraged them to raise 0.5 more problems (a topic requiring a GP to make a decision or diagnosis) and 0.9 more issues (the number of topics raised within each problem, such as symptoms) during each consultation.

This may mean many more problems and issues are addressed over the course of several visits.

Dr Matthew Ridd, from Bristol University's School of Social and Community Medicine, was part of the research team and said:

"Participants mostly reported a strong relationship with their GP, built-up over time. There was evidence that patients raised more problems and issues with GPs that they felt they had a deep relationship with.

"This could be because [patients](#) feel more comfortable raising additional issues with a GP they feel they know well, or because more issues can be addressed within the time available as the GP knows the patient and their medical history.

"This research study is the first of its kind to show how seeing the same doctor can positively affect consultations."

The study also found that the type of problem or issue raised was not related to the depth of the relationship between the patient and their doctor, except that behavioural problems or issues were less likely to be raised when a deep relationship existed.

Provided by University of Bristol

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