

Group doctor visits may improve life for people with muscle disorders

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A new study suggests that people with muscle diseases such as muscular dystrophies may benefit more from group doctor visits than individual appointments. The study is published in the June 18, 2014, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

"In this age when the demand for neurologists is rising faster than the supply and [health care costs](#) continue to rise, it's important to look for finding solutions that are both effective and efficient," said study author Femke M. Seensing, MSc, of Radboud University Medical Center in Nijmegen, Netherlands.

Group visits have shown benefits for people with other chronic conditions, but have not been studied for people with neuromuscular disorders.

For the study, 272 people with chronic neuromuscular disorders were randomly assigned to a group medical appointment or an individual appointment for their annual appointment. Spouses or partners were included. For the group visits, five to eight people with the same disorder saw a neurologist for an hour and a half to two hours. Individual appointments lasted 20 to 30 minutes. Participants then were given questionnaires that measured their quality of life one week, three months and six months after the appointment.

The study found that those in the group visits scored an average of three

points higher on a quality of life test than those in individual doctor appointments. Seesing noted that the benefit was modest. "While the improvement was similar to that seen in previous studies of group visits, it did not reach the five-point difference necessary to be clinically important," she said. "This may be due to the progressive nature of neuromuscular disorders."

Seesing said the group visits combine individualized care with peer support and the chance to learn from other people's experiences. "Group visits may be especially beneficial for patients with [neuromuscular disorders](#), where it can be difficult to address all of the complex problems of the disorder in a traditional appointment, and where the main treatment goals focus on optimizing quality of life and improving self-management in the absence of a cure."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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