

# Scoring system masks variation between GPs' communication skills

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A large-scale study has revealed that the system of aggregating practice scores on GPs' communication skills may mask variation between individual doctors in lower-scoring centres.

The research, led by the University of Exeter Medical School, in collaboration with Cambridge University, has discovered that higher scoring GP practices tend to include predominantly higher-scoring GPs, while lower scoring practices have a wider variation in individual scores.

The finding, part of a five year project funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), will be published in *The BMJ* on Saturday, November 15. It is based on a survey completed by more than 7,721 patients relating to 105 [doctors](#) in 25 practices across the country.

Professor John Campbell, of the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "Our findings identify and highlight the variation which patients might encounter in routine primary care practice. Patients might see a GP with excellent interpersonal skills, or may see one who is less skilled in communicating with patients. The current system of reporting communication at the level of the practice may mask the extent of this variation, as higher scoring doctors may pull up the average practice score. This has important implications for the ability to manage the performance of practices, as doctors with more modest interpersonal skills might be missed. Doctors' inter-personal skills need to be investigated at the level of the individual doctor, not the practice - especially in practices with scores which are at the lower end of overall

performance. Such investigation might offer potential to inform the doctor's ongoing professional development, and training can potentially be targeted to ensure the best experience for all [patients](#)."

Provided by University of Exeter

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