

Why are magazines in practice waiting rooms mainly old?

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Ever wondered why general practice waiting rooms contain mainly old magazines? Could it be that practice staff put out only old magazines or do they put out reasonably recent ones and these disappear?

Fed up with complaints about the lack of up to date magazines in the waiting room of his general practice, Professor Bruce Arroll and colleagues set out to answer the question. Their findings are published in the Christmas issue of *The BMJ*.

A total of 87 magazines were stacked into three mixed piles and placed in the waiting room of a general practice in Auckland, New Zealand. They included non-gossipy magazines (Time [magazine](#), the Economist, Australian Women's Weekly, National Geographic, BBC History) and gossipy ones (defined as having five or more photographs of celebrities on the front cover).

Of the 82 magazines with a date on the front cover, 47 were less than 2 months old and the rest were 3-12 months old. Each magazine was marked with a unique number on the back cover and monitored twice weekly.

The main aims of the study were to find out if the new or old magazines disappeared first, to measure the rate of loss, and the loss of gossipy compared with non gossipy magazines.

Afer 31 days the study was stopped and 41 of the 87 (47%) magazines

had disappeared - a disappearance rate of 1.32 magazines each day. Current magazines were more likely to go missing than older ones (59% compared with 27%).

Gossipy magazines were over 14 times more likely to disappear at any time than non-gossipy magazines. Of the 19 non-gossipy magazines (four Time magazines and 15 of the Economist), none had disappeared by the end of the study. Of the 27 gossipy magazines, only one was left.

Magazines that disappeared were also significantly cheaper than those that remained.

This study is possibly the first to explain the lack of up to date magazines in doctors' [waiting rooms](#) and to quantify their loss, say the authors.

Extrapolating their findings of 41 magazines each month at an average cost of £3.20 (\$5.00; €4.00) per magazine over the 8,000 practices in the UK, this equates to £12.6m disappearing from general practices - resources that could be better used for healthcare.

Practices should consider using old copies of the Economist and Time magazine as a first step towards saving costs, suggest the authors.

Further research would include identifying who or what is responsible for the removal of magazines, they conclude.

More information: *The BMJ*,
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