

What patients want most from their doctor is trust and respect, finds study

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Relationships between GPs and patients are changing. It is becoming more difficult for patients to see their preferred GP. In a study by researchers from the University of Bristol's Center for Academic

Primary Care, patients reported that, regardless of whether they were able to see the same GP or not, what they most wanted is to be trusted and respected by their GP.

The study, funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Primary Care Research and published in the *British Journal of General Practice* on 11 August, investigated what attributes patients most valued in a GP and how important they felt it was to see the same GP over time (continuity of care).

The study focused on patients with multiple long-term conditions, as previous studies have shown that they especially benefit from continuity of care.

Patients most wanted their GP to be clinically competent, and to examine, listen to, care for and take time with them, irrespective of whether they had seen them before.

Patients also believed there were benefits in seeing the same GP, which included GPs knowing their history, giving consistent advice, taking responsibility and action, and trusting and respecting them. Patients understood that the first three of these were hard to achieve when continuity of care was broken but felt that GPs should trust and respect their patients whether or not they had seen them before.

Dr. Mairead Murphy, a Research Fellow at the Center for Academic Primary Care and lead author of the study, said: "It is increasingly difficult for GPs to maintain continuity of care with patients.

Communication between GPs and patients may be damaged during the current pandemic, as GP consultations increasingly take place online or over the phone. Our study shows that patients are very clear about the attributes they value in a GP. They understand that continuity of care is not always possible, but they want, above all, to be respected and trusted

by their GP. For patients, trust and respect meant being believed, taken seriously and respected as experts in their own health and body. Because patients often feel mistrusted and taken less seriously by GPs who don't know them, GPs should go out of their way to demonstrate these aspects of trust and respect, especially when there is a lack of continuity of care."

Professor Chris Salisbury, a GP and secondary author of the study, added: "We hope that our findings will not only encourage GPs to reflect on their practice, but that policy makers will continue to promote continuity of care because of the known benefits it brings."

More information: Mairead Murphy et al. Relational continuity and patients' perception of GP trust and respect: a qualitative study, *British Journal of General Practice* (2020). [DOI: 10.3399/bjgp20X712349](https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp20X712349)

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