

Impact of same-day appointments on patient satisfaction with general practice appointment systems

Fiona Sampson, Mark Pickin, Alicia O'Gathain, Stephen Goodall and Chris Salisbury

ABSTRACT

Following recent concerns about patients' inability to book appointments in advance, this study examined the relationship between the proportion of GP appointments reserved for same-day booking, and patient satisfaction with appointment systems. In a survey of 12 825 patients in 47 practices, it was found that a 10% increase in the proportion of same-day appointments was associated with an 8% reduction in the proportion of patients satisfied. Practices should be wary of increasing the level of same-day appointments to meet access targets.

Keywords

appointments and schedules; family practice; health services accessibility; patient satisfaction; primary health care.

INTRODUCTION

Recent policy initiatives related to government targets for primary care access in *The NHS Plan*,¹ such as *Advanced Access*,² have led to changes in the numbers of appointments that are reserved for patients booking on the day (same-day appointments).³ This has led to high-profile criticisms that patients are less able to book appointments in advance,^{4,5} a particular concern for certain groups, such as older patients,⁶ and those with chronic conditions.^{7,8} There is also uncertainty about whether the success of these initiatives is related to the level of deprivation of the practice population.⁹ A recent evaluation of *Advanced Access* showed no difference in patient satisfaction with the appointment system between *Advanced Access* and control practices.⁹ However, there was considerable overlap between initiatives used by *Advanced Access* and control practices.⁹ Since difficulties in booking appointments in advance have been a focus of concern,¹ this study has examined the relationship between the proportion of GP appointments reserved for the same day and patient satisfaction with appointment systems, regardless of practices' *Advance Access* status.

METHOD

Data from the recent evaluation of *Advanced Access* were used, described in detail elsewhere.⁹ The data were a comparison of 48 general practices selected from 12 primary care trusts (PCTs) in England. The study made use of two components of this evaluation: a survey of practices and a survey of patients. The survey of practices undertaken in 2004 involved 391 practices from 12 PCTs purposefully selected to be representative of England.⁹ This provided data on the numbers of GP appointments offered in each practice, both bookable in advance and same-day only. The patient survey involved 12 825 adult patients attending 47 of the practices, undertaken in 2005.⁹ This provided data on patient satisfaction with the practice appointment system.

Analysis

Responses to a question about 'overall satisfaction with the appointment system', which had been

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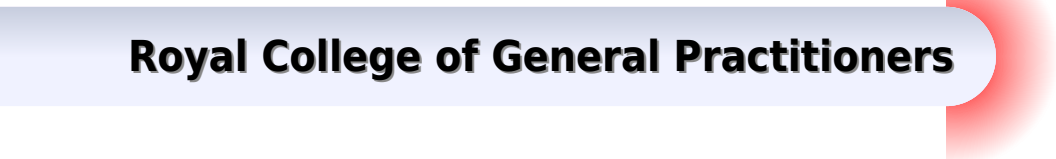
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