

## RESEARCH IN RURAL PRACTICE

### PATIENTS ABLE TO CHOOSE APPOINTMENT LENGTHS IN RURAL PRACTICE

In a recent article published in the British Journal of General Practice, [1] doctors at the Cheviot Medical Group, a small remote rural practice in North Northumberland, showed that patients, if given the choice of ten or twenty minute appointments, could accurately predict the time taken for the consultation.

Over a hundred consultations were studied and accurately timed. Ten per cent of patients chose an appointment length of twenty minutes. The mean actual consultation time for these patients was 18.14 minutes. Ninety per cent of patients chose a ten-minute appointment length. The mean actual consultation length for these patients was 11.24 minutes.

This study replicates earlier work done by one of the authors in an urban setting, where again, patients were shown to be able to choose accurately, and was also linked to increased doctor and patient satisfaction.

Dr Lambourn, who is a member of the RCGP Rural Forum Steering Group, commented: 'Practices are often frightened of introducing patient-decided consultation lengths, mainly through fear of being 'swamped' with patients asking for longer appointments. This and the earlier study show that in fact it's only around ten percent, and they get it right. Patients feel more empowered, surgeries run more on time, and doctor and patient satisfaction is increased. Not offering patients the choice does seem to be a no-brainer!'

If anyone would like to discuss further please contact  
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1. <http://bjgp.org/content/63/611/291.2.full>

2. Lambourn R (2003) Can patients choose appointment length? Br J Gen Pract 53(497):969-970