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Patient Views for Self-Referral to Specialists

SA Rasoulynejad

Abstract:

Background: Except in emergency cases, all patients should be seen first by a primary healthcare physician who decides whether a referral to secondary care is necessary. The present study examined the reasons for patient self-referral to specialists. Methods: A random sample of 1036 individuals was selected from people attending public outpatient clinics and specialists' offices in the private health sector. Of the sample, 40% were insured by the closed loop referral; 14% by the semi-closed-loop referral; and 46% were open referral. The data were analysed using χ^2 statistical test. Results: Of the closed-loop referral system patients, 6.8% were self-referred, as were 29.7% of semi-closed referral system patients and 75.5% of open referral system patients. There was a significant association between insurance type and patient self-referral to specialty care ($\chi^2 = 504$; $P < 0.0001$). The main reasons patients gave for by-passing GPs and self-referring to specialists were: the specialist's high degree of skill in the specific area of the health problem (54%); waste of time to see the GP for a referral (14.9%). Conclusion: The findings of this study demonstrate the high degree of difference in the rates of referral by GP and self-referral according to the healthcare delivery system.

Keywords:

[Health insurance](#) . [Healthcare delivery system](#) . [Referral system](#)

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