
DO WE NEED TO SEND COPIES OF CLINICAL LETTERS TO PATIENTS? A SURVEY OF PATIENTS' VIEWS IN A COMMUNITY PSYCHIATRIC OUT-PATIENT SETTING.

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Introduction

Since April 2004, Government policy in England upholds that clinicians should send copies of their clinical letters to their patients. However, some argue that patients already have the right to access their records under the Data Protection Act, 1998. Others suggest it is wiser not to provide a letter in certain circumstances. Little evidence is available examining the factors that impact on and underlie patients' views in relation to this.

Aim

To inform professionals about patients' views on receiving clinical letters.

Objectives

To establish the proportion and characteristics of patients who would like to receive clinical letters and to elicit underlying reasons for decisions.

Methods

Subjects were randomly sampled from an outpatient clinic and data collected using an 11-item questionnaire, between October 2010 and July 2013.

Results

The majority (60%) of patients wished to receive their clinical letter. Most (62%) favoured wanting to know about treatment primarily. Of those who did not wish to have a copy, greatest concerns were of loss in the post and 'unnecessary paperwork' (each 11%). This group of patients were characteristically male, aged 61-80, of Asian ethnicity, unmarried and unemployed. Patients with a diagnosis of adult personality and behaviour (ICD-10 F60-69) were most likely to opt to receive their clinical letter.

Conclusions

Although the majority preferred to receive clinical letters, reasons for preferences varied widely. With an increasing drive towards greater transparency in the health service, approaches to enhancing patient involvement will need to be flexible to the individual to enable truly meaningful patient participation.