

How do doctors and patients perceive coordination and continuity across care levels in Catalonia?

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Background

Care coordination is the harmonious connection of the different services needed to provide care to a patient throughout the care continuum in order to achieve a common objective without producing conflicts. Continuity of care relates to how patients experience coordination. The objective is to compare doctors' perceptions of coordination and patients' perceptions of continuity across care levels in different areas of the Catalan healthcare system (Spain).

Methods

A descriptive, qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with patients (49), GPs (26) and specialists (24) in three healthcare areas with different management models of services. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data was segmented by informant and study area. A thematic content analysis was carried out with a mixed generation of categories.

Results

Physicians and patients generally perceived that there was care coordination and continuity across levels, respectively and they

mainly referred to the clinical information transfer and agile communication between doctors. Additionally, doctors and patients also perceived consistency in prescriptions and tests, with no duplication. However, some limitations to both coordination and continuity were highlighted, some of which only emerged in some areas, and related to appropriate referrals and accessibility across levels. Firstly, some GP expressed insufficient specialist care when required -too early emergency and impatient discharge-, some referrals were rejected and patients perceived lack of needed referrals. Specialists considered that some primary care referrals were unnecessary. Secondly, especially GPs and patients expressed long waiting times to non-urgent secondary care.

Conclusions

Doctors and patients perceived that there is care coordination and continuity across care levels with some limitations that differed among areas and informants.

Key messages

- Main reasons for perceiving coordination and continuity across levels are information transfer and communication
- Problems refer to appropriateness of referrals and accessibility to secondary care