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Time consumed by interruptions in FM consultation

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Background & Aim: Residents of Family Medicine (FM) of two Family Health Units (FHU) in Portugal found that the consultation interruption, in addition to interfere with the doctor-patient relationship and increase the probability of medical error, cause unnecessary consumption of time. The study proposes to quantify the consultation time consumed by interruptions and characterize the type of interruption.

Method: Data were collected by FM residents through direct observation of consultations of fourteen General Practitioners. Subsequently were applied interventional measures giving preference to the use of non-face communication features.

Results: In 355 consultations, 132 (37.2%) were interrupted and the average of interruptions/consultations was 1.4. The average of time/consultation was 15 min and for an interruption was 47 sec. Consultation's time spent on interruptions was 146.8min (2.7%). The most common interruption was by telephone (54.0%) and then person interruption (42.9%). After the intervention defined above, it was found that in a total of 381 consultations 77 (20.2%) were interrupted. The average of interruptions/consultation was 1.1, time/consultation was 16.1min and for an interruption was 21.8sec. The consultation time spent on interruptions was 28.0min (0.5%). There most common type of interruption were person interruption and internal mail (36.5% both).

Conclusions: There was a decrease in the number of interrupted consultations (37.2% to 20.2%), less time spent by interruptions (47sec to 22seg). of the total consultations' time there was a reduction in the consumption of time spent by interruptions (2.7% to 0.5%). It is thought that these results produce benefit in the doctor-patient relationship.