Accompanied Consultations; a study to look at both patients’ and occupational health physicians’ opinions after a third person has been brought into the consultation room

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To elicit the views of both patients and occupational health physicians regarding accompanied consultations so that occupational health departments can provide written patient information prior to attendance at occupational health appointments.

Methods: An initial cross-sectional based study using a self-administered questionnaire given to 50 patients after accompanied consultations with 5 recruited physicians. The second phase of the study involved the study physician interviewing the 5 recruited physicians and ascertaining their general views on having a third person present during their consultations.

Results: Twenty-six patient questionnaires were completed giving a study response rate of 52%. The majority of responders were accompanied by a spouse (73%) and 3 responders (12%) were accompanied by non-family members. The patients reported that their companion had been helpful with recall of information (100%), had been supportive (100%), enabled them to discuss the outcome afterwards with their companion (92%), and could provide extra information to the physician (81%). Thirty-eight per cent of the responders had not discussed the role of their companion with either the physician or their companion prior to their appointment. Thirty-five per cent were unaware that a consultation could involve being physically examined and had not discussed the role of the companion with the occupational health staff. The physicians felt that the companion should not try and influence the consultation or management report.

Discussion: Written information may be helpful in allowing the patient to consider the role of their companion before an appointment and ensuring that they are aware of the likely personal nature of the discussions and possibility of a physical examination during their appointment. The physician should discuss helpful companion behaviours, be aware that the patient may be in poorer health and should reflect on their behaviour towards companions.

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