Abstract:

**Title:** **Evaluating Patient Perceptions of Physician Extenders**

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**Background:** Physician extenders have begun to take on responsibilities of physicians. A physician extender is defined as either a nurse practitioner or a physician assistant (PA) that does tasks that a physician commonly does. This change in view has occurred for many reasons including: a decreased number of primary care physicians that are available for routine physical examinations and the extensive amount of charting each patient requires. Previous studies have shown that patient satisfaction is equivalent between the two professions, and that further studies need to be done to determine what profession is preferred by patients. This study was designed to measure patient experience and satisfaction with a physician extender and how certain demographics can affect how a respondent answers. It was hypothesized that patients will be satisfied with their experience with a physician extender, but will prefer to see a physician when given the chance.

**Methods:** To assess the general public’s opinion about the situation, 200 anonymous surveys were passed out that contained 11 demographic questions and 14 survey questions about physician extender experience and comparison of the two professions. The answer choices from the survey included rating components of experience from 1-10, Yes & No Questions, and Sometimes, Never, Always, Usually. These surveys were passed out to patients, patient families, Cleveland Clinic staff, and residents of Cuyahoga County.

**Results:** When evaluating the experience with a physician extender, the most common response was “Always”, meaning that the physician extenders treated patients well. When comparing a physician extender versus a physician,the results showed that 64% of the sample population would not feel comfortable with a physician extender performing surgery on them. It also showed that cost could play somewhat of a role in deciding between going to a physician versus a physician extender. Most commonly, respondents reported that physician extenders were sometimes comparable to physicians when providing medical care.

**Conclusions:** The first part of the hypothesis was correct in that patients were satisfied with their experience with a physician extender. The second part of the hypothesis will need further research because the data showed that “Sometimes” was a common answer regarding those questions, suggesting that certain circumstances play a role between choosing the two professions. Demographics correlated with every question response, except for questions concerning cost, for which majority of respondents with children responded that cost was not a factor in seeking care from a physician extender. Those without children reported that their decision depends on cost difference. Patients may benefit from greater education in the difference between physicians and physician extenders because few could distinguish between the two providers.