

Attending the general practitioner for routine melanoma follow-up: the practical experiences of participants in an RCT

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Introduction: A randomised controlled trial of integrated general practitioner (GP) led follow-up versus standard hospital based follow-up for cutaneous melanoma has been conducted in 35 general practices in northeast Scotland. To complement the main analysis we wished to explore, in depth, participants' practical experience of attending their GP for melanoma follow-up.

Methods: 18 participants participated in semi structured telephone interviews based on an interview schedule. Interviews lasted between 16 and 53 minutes and were transcribed for analysis.

Results: Generally, appointments had been arranged and taken place timeously. Where appointments had taken place these had followed a clear and pre-specified structure in all cases. In most cases patients found it more convenient to attend the GP than the hospital, particularly in rural areas. Generally, patients found the appointments as satisfying and reassuring as hospital based follow-up, and in some cases preferred it. Conversely, there were instances where patients were less satisfied, a factor seemingly strongly linked to the pre-existing doctor patient relationship. It also appeared that patients who were less reassured tended to link this to aspects of their own personality rather than the skills of approach of the GP.

Conclusions: Integrated GP led follow-up for cutaneous melanoma appears to function with few practical difficulties. Patients find GP follow-up convenient and are generally as satisfied and reassured by GP follow-up, although the pre-existing patient-GP relationship appears to be critical. GP follow-up may not be suitable for certain patients, particularly those that perceive themselves to have an anxious personality.