**Title**

Registrar-initiated oversight support and advice in general practice: when and how do registrars seek help?

Author and affiliations

Dr Nancy Sturman, Primary Care Clinical Unit, University of Queensland

A/Professor Christine Jorm, University of Sydney

Professor Malcolm Parker, University of Queensland

**Background**

*GP registrars manage patient consultations independently from the beginning of their training, supervised by GPs in the practice. Effective clinical supervision is important in ensuring patient, registrar and practice safety, and facilitating registrar learning.*

**Aims**

*Although there has been recent Australian research on ad hoc supervision in general practice, and we have some information about the frequency with which registrars seek advice, little is known about how registrars make decisions to seek help to manage consultations with patients, or what strategies they use.*

**Method**

 *Seven focus groups with GP registrars were undertaken, exploring their help-seeking decisions and strategies, and experiences of help-seeking. Transcripts were analysed iteratively for emerging themes, and these were tested and further developed in subsequent focus group discussions.*

**Results**

*Participants reported asking questions frequently in their first few weeks, as they climbed a steep learning curve, and having concerns about the impact of this help-seeking on patient and supervisor impressions of their competence. As training progressed, registrars developed confidence in their clinical decisions, came to terms with the uncertainty of general practice and felt more able to delay help-seeking safely. Participants use a range of strategies for seeking help, which may be either immediate or somewhat delayed. Help may be requested face-to-face, by phone or electronically, either in the patient’s hearing or outside the consulting room. Participants avoided seeking help from GPs who seemed disinterested in teaching, or whose advice they did not trust. Several types of challenging clinical decisions, including whether to refer patients to emergency departments and how to manage patient expectations based on previous treatment by supervisors or other colleagues, were discussed relatively frequently.*

**Conclusion**

*Help-seeking decisions are complex and context-dependent. Research-informed training of registrars in help-seeking decisions and strategies may improve the quality of clinical supervision, registrar learning and patient safety.*

**References** (If applicable)