ABSTRACT

An Evaluation of the Referral-Consultation Process
Between Primary and Secondary/Tertiary Care
Physicians in Jamaica

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This study seeks to:

(1) Describe qualitatively and quantitatively the problems found to exist with the referral-consultation process.

(2) Highlight factors already in place which serve to promote an effective referral-consultation process.

(3) Identify areas seen as needing improvement in order to promote an effective referral-consultation process.

(4) Identify, based on conclusions drawn from the study, how problems may best be redressed and improvement made.

50 general practitioners volunteered to participate
in part one of the study.
These physicians recorded over a ten week period of
time, relevant details of all referrals made.

In part two of the study a questionnaire was
administered to 25 specialty consultants chosen by
stratified random sampling techniques.

The results reveal that general practitioner referral
patterns in Jamaica concur closely with general
practitioner referral patterns in Britain and North
America with about 45% of all referrals being made to
the specialties of surgery, obstetrics and
gynaecology, ophthalmology and orthopaedics.

Findings in this study indicate that at the present
time the referral-consultation process functions
poorly.

There is a lack of awareness of the value of a
functioning referral-consultation process among
physicians and this situation is worsened by economic
constraints and time limitations.

A need exists to establish a permanent forum for
general practitioner-consultant interaction which
would serve through discussion to remedy some of the
existing problems.
One important finding is that where levels of interaction are increased between referring physicians and consultants and a more personal relationship is forged the functioning of the referral process improves.

The author hopes that some of the findings and recommendations of this study will provide a basis for further discussions and investigations on this important topic.