

ABSTRACT

This study took a retrospective look at referrals from a primary care physician to secondary and tertiary care institutions during three years of post graduate training : July 1988 to September 1991. The aims were to assess the types of referrals made, their outcome and the degree of communication that existed between the specialties.

Of the 151 patients referred, 41 (27.2%) were males and 110 (72.8%) were females, a male: female ratio of 1:2.7. The patients' records were found to have documentation on the referral outcome in 64.9% of the cases. Of the remaining 35.1%, information was obtained by telephone enquiring about the referral. However in 6.6% of the cases no contact was possible.

The age of the referrals followed that of the population distribution with the majority (37.8%) in the reproductive age group (15-44 years). Of the total referrals, 37.8% were distributed to the surgical disciplines whereas 6.0% went to the medical. Most of the referrals went to General Surgery, Accident and Emergency, Ophthalmology and to the Dietician (Nutritionist).

Compliance with referrals was found to be 78.2% with 13.3% of the patients requiring admission to hospital at the time of referral. Of the patients referred, 63.6% had an outpatient follow-

up appointment and 19.2% required emergency management. Resolution of the problem occurred in 42.4% of patients. What was interesting is that, 95.4% of the patients returned to the primary care setting after referral.

Communication between the specialties and the primary care occurred in 11.9% of the referrals. Most information on referral outcome was by patient's "word of mouth" in 69.5% of cases, while in 18.5% of the referrals there was no information on the outcome. On review of the referrals, the author felt that in 11.3% of cases referral was untimely.

DEDICATION

To my children

Jan, William, Matthew.

By driving force,