

Plain English Publication Summary

Publication title: [Safety work and risk management as burdens of treatment in primary care: insights from a focused ethnographic study of patients with multimorbidity](#)

Publication details (Vancouver format)

Daker-White G, Hays R, Blakeman T, Croke S, Brown B, Esmail A, Bower P. Safety work and risk management as burdens of treatment in primary care: insights from a focused ethnographic study of patients with multimorbidity. BMC family practice. 2018 Dec;19(1):155.

What was known before your paper was published?

When people have multiple health problems it is more work for doctors and patients to manage all the treatments, tests and appointments. Having multiple health problems (or being “multimorbid”) puts patients at increased risk of safety problems, such as medical errors or bad reactions to medicines prescribed by doctors.

What did you do?

We tracked a group of 26 patients for 2 years, following the course of their health problems, appointments and treatments. The study was based at patients’ family doctors (or general practices) in Greater Manchester. We interviewed and observed patients and their carers’ and looked at medical records to find problems in the processes of care as they happened.

What did you find?

Against expectations, we mainly found that the work involved in keeping patients safe creates extra work on top of normal medical care. This is an issue when the health system, doctors and patients are already overstretched when dealing with the numbers of patients using NHS services.

What insights/knowledge did you add?

In a health system which is seen as overloaded, keeping people safe involves more work which could be overloading the system even more. The findings point to a possible optimum level of service use rather than “over” or “under” consultation. Not consulting enough can cause problems for patients who are “off the practice radar.” Consulting too much may lead to over investigation and increase the risks of medical harm. This issue might apply to other patients, e.g. who only have one health condition, and points to an area of further investigation for patient safety researchers.