LETTER TO THE EDITOR

HAPPIER PATIENTS

To The Editor—We enjoyed the article by Sherbourne et al., “What outcomes matter to patients?”¹ In the absence of achieving perfect health, there are numerous other ways of making patients feel better.^{2–4} In a similar approach, earlier this year we conducted a study in the general internal medicine clinics of our hospital. Four hundred randomly selected patients (224 women, 176 men) answered questions on what they would like their appointments and physicians to be like. Regarding appointments, 81% of patients preferred seeing the same physician even if that meant waiting longer; only 11% preferred shorter waiting even if it meant seeing another physician. Only 16% were comfortable with insurance companies

preselecting physicians for them. The quality the patients appreciated most from their physician was his or her patience in giving detailed explanations (64%), followed by punctuality in seeing the patient at the appointed time (18%). The majority of patients were indifferent to the physician's age (70%) and sex (68%); those who discriminated preferred physicians of older age (74%) and same sex (68%). In which country the physician graduated was irrelevant to 65% of patients, while 33% preferred U.S. graduates. For routine pelvic and rectal examinations, 44% of patients were comfortable with the general practitioner, whereas 52% preferred a separate appointment with a specialist. These data suggest that patients can be made happier by simple measures such as offering more choices (same physician versus shorter waiting or physician of the same sex) and better education about their condition.—**EDIN KARCIC, MD, and ARSAD A. KARCIC, MD, NCMC, SUNY at Stony Brook, East Meadow, NY.**

JGIM welcomes your letters and comments. Letters may contain brief commentaries on articles published in the Journal, illustrative case reports, general suggestions for improving the Journal, or other information of interest to readers. Letters to the Editor should not exceed 450 words in length and should be sent in triplicate (typed, double-spaced). We cannot guarantee publication and we may edit to improve readability.

You may send your letters to us by mail or fax: JGIM, JHU Division of General Internal Medicine, 1830 East Monument Street, Room 8068, Baltimore, MD 21205; fax (410) 955-0825.

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