Travel Time and Travel Costs for Patients Collecting Repeat Prescriptions in Several District Hospitals in Sabah

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Abstract: In MOH pharmacies, prescriptions for chronic medications are partially dispensed with a supply duration of 1 month, to ensure the quality use of medicines. Monthly visits may impose nontrivial travel time and costs on patients. This study aimed to assess travel time and costs to collect repeat prescriptions at district hospitals in Sabah. A cross-sectional study, with 310 respondents was recruited using convenient sampling, over 3 months (April to June 2019). The questionnaire was adapted from a study conducted in Denmark, which was pilot-tested before the main study. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS (version 18) and presented using descriptive statistics. A statistically significant difference was defined at p-value < 0.05. 310 participants responded in 6 district hospitals (Beluran Hospital, Kinabatangan Hospital, Beaufort Hospital, Kuala Penyu, Hospital, Ranau Hospital, Pitas Hospital) in Sabah. The results of this study suggested that for patients collecting repeat prescriptions at government hospitals in Sabah, the median travelling cost for a return trip was RM 8.00 (IQR RM 11.00), while the median travelling time for a return trip was 30 minutes (IQR 45 minutes). Overall, the reported median cost and time spent to collect repeat prescriptions were not surprising. Among the problems faced were the unavailability of a method to validate the travel time and cost estimates, and it was suspected that some respondents might have a lack of knowledge regarding travel costs. However, the detailed data on travel time fits well with expectations based on the relatively sparse distribution of healthcare facilities within a relatively large state of Sabah. This study was not powered to detect the social impact on patients in marginalized groups (high cost and lengthy time of travel), and future studies should focus on this section of the population, to review the current policy for this group of patiens.

Keywords: prescription, travel cost, travel time