



December 2019

# Patient Visit Content Affects Provider Ratings of Mental Workload in Providing Care

## Key Findings

- Provider characteristics (eg, age, sex, and years of experience) were unrelated to clinical work intensity.
- Provider-reported clinical work intensity is directly associated with terminal prognosis discussions, chemotherapy discussions, and level of service.
- Training in difficult conversations could reduce clinical work intensity for visits of that type.

## The Question:

What patient visit factors increase or decrease the mental workload of medical oncologists and nurse practitioners?

Excessive levels of clinical work intensity can affect patient outcomes, quality of care and provider sense of well-being. Increasing therapeutic complexity, high patient loads, electronic health record engagement during the visit, and other organizational or management factors inordinately increase clinical work intensity. However less is known about the association between characteristics of the patient visit (treatment factors) and level of clinical work intensity.

Matthew F. Hudson, Ph.D., M.P.H. and colleagues from Prisma Health and the University of South Carolina collected data on provider demographics and visit characteristics, including visit charge level. Providers completed a clinical work intensity measure after each of five randomly-selected visits on each of four, randomly selected, days. Funded by grants from The Hope Foundation and Prisma Health, analyses controlled for provider characteristics to more explicitly consider select visit characteristics potentially influencing reported work intensity. In subsequent phases, they will seek to identify other, modifiable factors of the practice environment that increase or decrease the mental workload of medical oncologists and oncologic nurse practitioners.

## The Implications:

Training in difficult conversations may reduce clinical work intensity for visits involving discussions about chemotherapy or terminal prognosis.

The study found that provider-rated clinical work intensity is influenced by visit characteristics, but not by provider characteristics such as age, sex, and years of experience. This finding compliments current research on provider-based interventions intended to achieve the quadruple aim of enhanced workforce well-being, improved patient experience with care, reduced costs of care and better access. Future work will more explicitly examine practice-related factors associated with intensity and assess the impact of appropriate interventions.

## Learn More

For more information, please review the full article in the Journal of Oncology Practice [here](#).