Physician Perspectives on Needs, Gaps, and Opportunities for Improving the Care of Individuals with Severe Mobility Impairments in Primary Care

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**Objective:**
To explore family physicians’ perspectives on primary care for individuals with severe mobility impairments.

**Design:**
Qualitative study using structured interviews.

**Participants:**
Family physicians practicing in family health teams within Waterloo-Wellington region in Southwestern Ontario.

**Methods:**
- Twenty structured interviews were conducted in October and November 2012.
- Inductive analysis was used to identify reoccurring themes in the data.

**Main Findings:**

**Barriers to Care**
- Patient difficulty getting to the medical office.
- Lack of specialized equipment.
- Limited physician academic preparation for clinical care.
- Knowledge gaps.
- Time constraints in practice.
- Limited remuneration for extra time required.
- Difficulty accessing community-based services, specialists and laboratories.
- For some physicians, accessing the Emergency Department to see patients was identified as an easy solution to accessibility challenges experienced in their medical office.

“I wouldn’t say that we had formal training that gave us the skills to assess whether their needs were being met.”

“It was very limited experience, especially in the office setting.”

**Care Gaps**
- Limited use of standardized tools to assess care needs.
- Focus on episodic rather than preventative care.
- Limited opportunities to conduct proper physical examinations in the absence of specialized equipment.

**Needed Resources to Improve Care**
- Point-of-practice tools.
- Knowledge of management strategies.
- Staff training on safe patient transfers.
- Greater remuneration.
- Access to consultation support.
- Low patient volumes, in relation to total patient caseload, impact decision-making regarding continuing education and the acquisition of specialized equipment.

**Conclusions:**
- Individuals with severe mobility impairments represent a low volume patient population with high health care needs but experience significant barriers and care gaps in primary care.
- The low prevalence of patients with severe mobility impairment per individual family physician negatively impacts the acquisition of necessary equipment and knowledge required to care for these patients.
- Novel approaches to providing care are needed to address this challenge.
- Multidisciplinary primary care Mobility Clinics established regionally within family health teams might be well positioned to address this gap.

“**I think if the physicians there who are involved in the clinic are available for even a quick phone call or discussion with regards to the care of these patients, I think that might be helpful.”**