

Abstract

BACKGROUND: Sleep is an essential function of everyday life and an important public health topic. Many children suffer from sleep disordered breathing (SDB) which inhibits or interrupts sleep and ranges in severity from harmless snoring to life-threatening obstructive sleep apnea. The University of Florida's Sleep Disorder Lab/Clinic sees patients 6 days a week in order to diagnose and treat various SDB conditions. Every day, 1-2 patients miss their scheduled appointment leaving many children with undiagnosed and untreated breathing problems. It is hypothesized that families and patients are experiencing barriers to care which affect accessing the clinic/lab.

METHODS: A survey was developed and sent to two different populations – families who attended clinic/lab during the month of March and families who missed a scheduled appointment at the clinic/lab during the last three months. The survey assessed demographics, barriers to care, and ways to improve services to patients.

RESULTS: A total of 291 participants were contacted either in person or via mail. A majority (51.4%) of parents were white, non-Hispanic (77.8%), and between the ages of 25-39 (55.6%). Twenty-six individuals (36%) indicated they experienced at least one barrier to accessing their scheduled appointment. The patient type (show vs. no-show) was the only correlation found to be related to whether an individual encountered any barrier ($p = 0.02$). The variables 'unable to find transportation', 'price of gas', and 'clinic is too far away' were combined into a single 'transportation problems' variable. This new variable was significantly ($p < 0.0001$) correlated to encountering any barriers to care.

DISCUSSION: If a parent/caregiver missed a scheduled appointment, it is more than likely because they experienced a problem accessing the clinic/lab. Parents who did attend clinic/lab also faced barriers to care, however, reported the ability to overcome these obstacles. If resources like a gas card could be provided, more families would be able to make their scheduled appointments.