

Supplementary box 1 – Delphi consensus panel (digital)

Round 1 – First statements

Statement 1

Patients show evident interpersonal variation in how symptoms/complaints are being experienced.

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	Agree	I see great variation. For example: some patients show up for a consultation directly when they have a complaint, others have a wait-and-see or don't even visit the GP at all.
2	Agree	Having a complaint is per definition a personal experience.
3	Agree	I keeps surprising me how different people can react and cope with complaints. So yes, I see a lot of interpersonal variation and usually former experiences and stories from the close environment play a roll.
4	Agree	I think that all thinkable variation in characteristics (e.g. education, culture, medical background) has a big influence in how medical complaints are experienced.
5	Agree	Anxiety and worry seem to increase suffering. Patients who are less anxious about pain can be reassured more effectively and also seem to recover faster.
6	Agree	In the perception/experience of complaints, on closer inspection, apart from pain and other discomfort, the own interpretation of the cause, additional emotions, previous experiences, social desirability, concern about what it can mean for my functioning, and other situational factors also appear to play a role. This explains the interpersonal variation in complaint experience. It even happens with apparently harmless complaints such as sore throat.
7	Agree	You have patients who experience complaints more severely than others.
8	N/A	

Conclusion: all GPs agree that there is evident interpersonal variation in how symptoms/complaints are being experienced.

Statement 2

Older adults (on average) experience symptoms/complaints differently than younger adults.

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	Agree	Young people often want to get rid of the complaints immediately, sometimes curious about the cause, but prefer to heal quickly. Older people are more likely to worry about a more serious cause.
2	Disagree	I think the variation is not so much dependent on age. Perhaps more of what you have been given from childhood in the complaint experience, and the help-seeking behaviour.
3	Disagree	This question suggests that age plays a role. My impression is that experience with pain or discomfort in particular is a larger variable than age itself. Sometimes familiarity with (the meaning of) a particular complaint leads to a feeling of reassurance and therefore to fewer visits to the doctor.
4	Agree	This also differs greatly per person, but in general I have the feeling that older people can more easily accept what comes their way and young people are more of a makeable society where everything must be solved.
5	Agree	Depending on which complaint I think age can influence this.
6	Agree	What strikes me most is that older people delve into their complaints differently and come up with other medical issues.
7	Agree	On the one hand, their previous experience more often plays a role in older people. Moreover, complaints can be experienced as 'it is simply part of getting older' and are more or less accepted. Sometimes the elderly can also say that the burden of treatment is greater than the burden of living with it. Younger adults, on the other hand, generally want to be able to function properly in all respects and experience complaints as an obstacle to this: "something has to be done about it".
8	Agree	On average, young patients experience a complaint as much more disturbing than older people who can more easily accept discomfort

Conclusion: most, but not all, GPs agree that older adults experience symptoms/complaints differently than younger adults.

Statement 3

Males (on average) experience symptoms/complaints differently than females.

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	Agree	It sounds very cliché, but it is not for nothing that men often deny complaints or feel very bad.
2	Disagree	Same as question 2: I don't think the variation is so dependent on gender. Perhaps more of what you have been given from childhood.
3	Agree	In medical practice there does indeed seem to be a difference in perception based on gender. This can also be related to the way in which complaints are expressed to the doctor. In general, the man tends to describe his experience of complaints or feelings of fear somewhat more rationally.
4	Disagree	I don't see obvious gender variation rather age or interpersonal variation.
5	Agree	Depending on which complaint, yes.
6	Partially Agree	Men often find it more difficult to tell a complaint, but often experience it the same as a woman, presentation is just more different
7	Disagree	There are certainly examples (and stereotypes), which are also often correct: "men are more sensitive, women are more scared". But on the whole I think this is not true and the complaint experience is the same.
8	Agree	There may be differences in the perception of complaints between men and women. I don't think that's clear. The difference in presentation is much clearer. Women often present their complaint in their context. The run-up, the circumstances at home and at work, the influence on functioning are more often mentioned spontaneously. They more often want advice on how to deal with it and not always immediate medical treatment. Men often present their complaints very specifically and as a defect or a problem that needs a solution. Men come less often, but more often want a concrete solution in the form of a treatment.

Conclusion: There are mixed thoughts among GPs whether male patients experience symptoms/complaints differently than female patients.

Statement 4

Differences in how patients experience a symptom/complaint depends, among other things, on the type of symptom/complaint.

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	N/A	
2	Agree	Although I think the individual variation is more important than the type of complaint.
3	Agree	Completely dependent on the type of complaint in my view
4	Agree	I think so, but how this might work? Abdominal pain and headache can cause a lot of worry, throat or ear pain / musculoskeletal system often less. Possibly pain in an area where there are more vital organs also causes more fear?
5	Agree	There is indeed some difference in experience with the type of complaint. The different locations, sensations or functional limitations of a complaint can evoke different experiences via the meaning people give to it.
6	Agree	Yes some people panic completely, others don't even come for it, often depending on experience, family etc.
7	Agree	I think this is also related to how many variations there are within the complaint. For example, abdominal pain has a much broader spectrum than sore throat.
8	Agree	Indeed, the type of complaint does seem to play a role. Experience seems to me to be mainly linked to anxiety or fear. But whether a particular complaint leads to feelings of anxiety is related to prior information, personal experience and personality characteristics.

Conclusion: all GPs agree that differences in how patients experience a symptoms/complaints is partly depended of the type of symptoms/complaints.

Round 2 – Modified statements for enhanced consensus

Each participating GP was handed out a summary of the round 1 statements, containing the reactions of all participating GPs. Furthermore, the statements were modified to enhance consensus in the second round (if consensus was not already reached).

Statement 1 (modification of statement 2 / round 1)

Older adults (on average) present symptoms/complaints differently than younger adults (this could be due to age itself as well as to factors associated with age such as difference in illness experience, life goals, information gathering etc.).

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	Agree	Indeed, acceptance as part of getting older versus the desire for a fix.
2	Agree	I think life experience and life goals play a role in the experience of complaints and that generally differs between younger and older patients.
3	Agree	Concerns and type of information gathering are different.
4	Agree	N/A
5	Agree	Elderly are generally more afraid of a severe medical cause, possibly due to former experiences. On the other hand, they can be more at peace with getting older.
6	Neutral	N/A
7	Agree	Age and age-related factors play a role in the presentation of a complaint.
8	N/A	

Conclusion: There is broad agreement among the GPs that older adults (on average) express symptoms/complaints differently than younger adults.

Statement 2 (modification of statement 3 / round 1)

Males (on average) present symptoms/complaints differently than females (although variation between individuals could be greater than these male-female differences).

#GP	Answer	Comment (summary)
1	Agree	Female patients have different experience in health care, making them more experienced patients who are more eager to participate during the consultation.
2	Agree	I can imagine this is true.
3	Neutral	I don't think differences are very large.
4	Agree	Men are typically more goal orientated (without showing emotion and fear) and females present complaints more context orientated.
5	Neutral	N/A
6	Agree	I agree. A doctor should be aware of these differences in order to adequately asses the complaint.
7	Agree	I think this is also related to how many variations there are within the complaint. For example, abdominal pain has a much broader spectrum than sore throat.
8	N/A	

Conclusion: There is broad agreement among the GPs that male patients (on average) express symptoms/complaints differently than female adults.

Question 3

In which of following symptoms/complaints there is a significant difference in the presentation between young adults and the elderly?

	GP 1	GP 2	GP 3	GP 4	GP 5	GP 6	GP 7	% agreement
Nevus / birthmark				X	X			29%
<u>Eczema / dermatitis</u>		X	X	X			X	57%
<u>Knee complaints</u>	X	X	X		X		X	71%
Lower back pain	X				X			29%
<u>Headache</u>			X	X	X		X	57%
Shoulder complaints								0%
<u>Other visual complaints</u>	X	X	X		X		X	71%
<u>Leg varicose</u>	X	X			X		X	57%
Aspecific localized abdominal pain			X				X	29%
<u>Tiredness / weakness</u>			X		X	X	X	57%
Floaters / flickers / flashes	X			X			X	43%
Knee osteoarthritis	X						X	29%
Hearing complaints	X						X	29%

Conclusion: symptoms of which most GPs think the experience and expression are influenced by patient age were: eczema / dermatitis, knee complaints, headache, other visual complaints, leg varicoses and tiredness / weakness.

Question 4

In which of following symptoms/complaints there is a significant difference in the presentation between male and female patients?

	GP 1	GP 2	GP 3	GP 4	GP 5	GP 6	GP 7	% agreement
Nevus / birthmark					X			14%
Eczema / dermatitis					X		X	29%
Knee complaints								0%
Lower back pain		X					X	29%
<u>Headache</u>	X	X		X	X		X	71%
Shoulder complaints								0%
Other visual complaints								0%
<u>Leg varicose</u>	X	X			X		X	57%
<u>Aspecific localized abdominal pain</u>	X			X	X		X	57%
<u>Tiredness / weakness</u>	X	X	X		X		X	71%
Floaters / flickers / flashes								0%
Knee osteoarthritis								0%
Hearing complaints								0%

Conclusion: symptoms of which most GPs think the experience and expression are influenced by patient gender were headache, leg varicoses, aspecific localized abdominal pain and tiredness / weakness.