

# Australians may be risking their health by 'practice hopping'

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While most Australians have a regular GP and a usual general practice clinic, more than a quarter visit multiple practices, potentially risking their health if important medical information is not passed on, according to new research from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Business School.

The study, "How common is multiple [general practice](#) attendance in Australia?," published in the *Australian Journal of General Practice*, surveyed more than 2400 respondents to estimate the prevalence of multiple practice attendance in Australia.

General Practitioner Dr. Michael Wright and co-authors from the UTS Centre for Health Economic Research and Evaluation (CHERE) found more than 90% of those surveyed had a usual practice and more than 80% had a usual GP, but 25% had attended more than one practice in the previous year.

Dr. Wright said general practice healthcare risked being fragmented if patients seek care from multiple GPs in multiple locations.

"In Australia, a patient's usual GP does not receive [information](#) about any 'non-usual' practice attendance, if the information is not volunteered by the patient," Dr. Wright said.

"If important information is not shared between practices, patients could potentially experience worse [health](#) outcomes," he said.

International evidence has found patients significantly benefit from having a usual GP and are less likely to need expensive emergency department or hospital care.

Dr. Wright suggested the fragmentation of care caused by multiple practice attendance could be reduced if practices shared consultation information with the patient's usual GP.

"The current system provides high levels of choice for patients, but may reduce continuity of care," Dr. Wright said.

"The roll-out of My Health Record will improve the sharing of patient

information. But My Health Record does not have access to the records at a general practice.

"So patients should still tell their usual GP if they have been to another practice so their GP is aware and their practice [record](#) can be updated," he said.

The research revealed that multiple practice attendance was more common in younger patients, and patients living in major cities.

"When [patients](#) visit another [practice](#), this appears more commonly due to convenience or difficulty in getting an appointment with their usual GP, rather than cost being a barrier," Dr. Wright said.

**More information:** How common is multiple general practice attendance in Australia? *Australian Journal of General Practice*, [www.racgp.org.au/AJGP/2018/May ... ple-general-practice](http://www.racgp.org.au/AJGP/2018/May...ple-general-practice)

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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