College of Human Medicine
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Questionnaire Fatigue: Evaluating Patient Tolerance of Patient-Reported Outcome Questionnaire Length and Delivery Methods

Authors: Eaman Ahmad, BS,† Stephanie Ryan, BS,‡ Theresa Zatirka, MPH,‡ Linda Bargamian, MBA,‡ Nancy Isken, MPA,‡ Julie Goldstein-Dunn, MBA,‡ Ravi R. Shah, MD‡

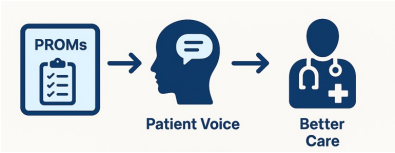
Introduction

Background information:

- Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) are questionnaires that are vital for improving healthcare quality, enhancing clinical decision-making, and supporting patient-centered care.[1-2]
- As the use of PROMs increase, so does the risk of survey fatigue- when patients become disengaged or overwhelmed by the number and length of questionnaires.[3-5]
- This can lead to lower response rates and diminish the quality of collected data, ultimately compromising clinical decision-making.[6-8]

Objective:

- To evaluate patient preferences for the length and mode of delivery of PROM questionnaires to inform strategies that reduce survey fatigue while ensuring high-quality, meaningful data collection.



Methods

Study Design:

- A retrospective review of a cross-sectional, descriptive survey administered online between June 12 and June 26, 2025.

Population:

- Adult members of the Henry Ford Insights Program: a group of 4,136 patients representative of the Southeast Michigan community.

Data Collection:

- A total of 1,297 completed surveys were collected and analyzed.
- The survey explored: patient perceptions of clinical questionnaires, preferred delivery methods, acceptable time and length, and factors that motivate completion.

Results

Preferred Delivery Method:

- An overwhelming majority of patients (80.3%) preferred to complete PROMs electronically through the MyChart patient portal before their appointment.

Acceptable Number of Questionnaires:

- 31.1% were willing to complete a maximum of 1 questionnaire
- 25.1% were willing to complete 2 questionnaires
- 15.3% were willing to complete 3 questionnaires
- 24.4% were willing to complete 4 or more questionnaires

Acceptable Time Commitment:

- 23.7% were willing to spend 1-3 minutes
- 36.2% were willing to spend 4-6 minutes
- 18.1% were willing to spend 7-10 minutes

Key Motivators:

- Patients reported they would be more likely to complete forms if they knew the provider would review their responses and if the purpose of the questionnaire was clearly explained.

How much total time would you be willing to spend completing clinical questionnaires before your provider visit? As a reminder, these questionnaires ask about your symptoms and are used by your health care team.

Less than a minute	2.62%	34
1-3 minutes	23.67%	307
4-6 minutes	36.16%	469
7-10 minutes	18.12%	235
11-15 minutes	6.01%	78
More than 15 minutes	0.77%	10
As much time as needed	10.56%	137
I would not be willing to complete any questionnaires	2.08%	27
Total	100.00%	1297

Figure 1. Distribution of Time Patients are Willing to Spend on Questionnaires.

What is the maximum number of clinical questionnaires you would be willing to complete before a provider visit? As a reminder, these questionnaires ask about your symptoms and are used by your health care team.

1	31.07%	403
2	25.13%	326
3	15.27%	198
4 or more	24.44%	317
I would not be willing to complete any questionnaires	4.09%	53
Total	100.00%	1297

Figure 2. Maximum Number of Questionnaires Patients are Willing to Complete.

Conclusions

- The majority of patients prefer completing 1 to 2 PROM questionnaires electronically via a patient portal before their visit and are willing to spend 6 minutes or less on this.
- To minimize survey fatigue and improve data quality, healthcare systems should prioritize shorter, electronic questionnaires that offer patients flexibility.
- Clearly communicating the purpose of PROMs and how they will be used in clinical care is a critical factor in motivating patient engagement.
- These findings provide a clear foundation for designing PROM delivery systems that optimize comprehensive data collection while respecting patient time and reducing respondent burden.

Future Directions:

- Use these findings to test PROM redesigns using a shorter format.
- Examine demographic differences in tolerance and digital accessibility.
- Evaluate whether improved PROM design increases completion rates and clinical utility.

References

1. Black N. Patient reported outcome measures could help transform healthcare. *BMJ*. 2013;346:f167
2. Basch E. Patient-reported outcomes—Harnessing patients' voices to improve clinical care. *N Engl J Med*. 2017;376(2):105-108.
3. Nelson EC, Eftimovska E, Lind C, et al. Patient reported outcome measures in practice. BMJ 2015;350:g7818. 10.1136/bmj.g7818.
4. Sharma H. How short or long should be a questionnaire for any research? Researchers' dilemma in deciding the appropriate questionnaire length. *Perspect Clin Res*. 2021;12(3):152-156.
5. Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods. (2008).
6. *Phillips AW, Reddy S, Durning SJ. Improving response rates and evaluating nonresponse bias in surveys: AMEE Guide No.102. Med Teach. 2016;38:217–28*
7. Aiyegbusi OL, Roydhouse J, Cruz Rivera S, et al. Key considerations to reduce or address respondent burden in patient-reported outcome (PRO) data collection. *Nat Commun*. 2022;13:6026.
8. Ratnayake I, Ahern S, Ruseckaite R. Acceptability of patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) in a cystic fibrosis data registry. *BMJ Open Respir Res*. 2021;8(1):e000927.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the Henry Ford Insights program and the Henry Ford Health Marketing team for administering the surveys and gathering the data.