

**Patients' attitudes to comforting touch in family practice.**

Osmun WE, Brown JB, Stewart M, Graham S. Canadian Family Physician December 2000; 46:2411-2416.

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**Abstract:**

**Objective.** To examine patients' attitudes to comforting touch in family practice.

**Design:** A survey was designed with statements and responses to proposed scenarios.

**Setting:** Twenty family practices throughout Ontario.

**Participants:** Family practice patients; of 400 surveys distributed, 376 were completed (94% response rate).

Main Outcome Measures: Patients responded to scenarios on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Results were analyzed using SPSS for DOS.

**Results:** Most patients in this population believed that touch can be comforting (66.3%) and healing (57.9%). Women were more accepting of comforting touch than men in all scenarios. Acceptance of comforting touch declined for both sexes as touch became proximal and more intimate. Men and women were more accepting of comforting touch from female doctors. Acceptance of all comforting touch declined markedly if a physician was unfamiliar to a patient, regardless of the physician's sex.

**Conclusion:** Most patients surveyed believed touch is comforting and healing and viewed distal touches (on the hand and shoulder) as comforting.

**Comments:**

**Strengths/uniqueness:** This is a well-described thoughtful report. It is impressive that 94% of 400 distributed surveys were returned.

**Weakness:**The authors acknowledge the shortcomings of this report, mostly existing for practical reasons.

**Relevance to Palliative Care:** This report provides some reassurance for physicians in all specialties regarding touch considered comforting, and provides some caution when patients are not well known to the health care professional. A similar project in different palliative care settings would be worthwhile.