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Characteristics of patients utilizing the Out Patient Department of Colombo South Teaching Hospital and their association with presenting complaints

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Objectives: An outpatient department(OPD) serves a vital role in providing health care services. Identification of patient characteristics and their relationship with presenting complaints is important in improving quality of care. Objective of this study was to describe characteristics of patients utilizing OPD at Colombo South Teaching Hospital (CSTH) and their association with presenting complaints.

Methods: Cross sectional study was conducted by recruiting 850 subjects who attended OPD by systematic sampling. A pre-tested interviewer administered questionnaire was used. Relevant descriptive statistics were calculated and comparisons were done to elicit statistical significance using p value.

Results: Total sample was consisted of 801 subjects giving a non response rate of 5.8%. Mean age was 32.4 (SD+/- 18.5) and highest age group was 26-35. Majority were females (53.6%), were Sinhala (88.6%) Buddhists (79.5%), had secondary education (55.5%), were employed (52.6%) and were married (77.4%). Majority were presented with acute illnesses (75.2%) and also conditions related to respiratory system (48.2%) Cough was the commonest main presenting complaint (18.8%) followed by fever (16.7%) and backache (10.1%). More patients were in younger age group who complained cough as the major problem (p=0.0001). Among those who came with back ache, majority were females (p=0.0003) and from elder age group (p=0.0180).

Conclusions: Among patients utilizing OPD of CSTH majority were females, from 26-35 age group, Sinhala, Buddhist, had secondary education and married. Acute respiratory related medical problems were the commonest and cough was the top presenting complaint and most of them were from younger age group.