

# A Thematic Analysis of Barriers to Treatment for Patients Seeking Primary Care Services from Visiting Medical Missions: Dajabon, Dominican Republic

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## INTRODUCTION

Waves of Health (WOH) is an organization of physicians and other healthcare professionals established in 2007 whose mission is to supplement primary care-based services in Dajabon, Dominican Republic and other areas. Care is provided in partnership with local physicians and nurses.

An interdisciplinary team travels to this region twice a year and establishes a treatment center where patients are triaged, medically evaluated, provided any medications necessary to manage acute or chronic illnesses, counseled about the medications dispensed, and given general health information.

## GOALS

Patients in Dajabon, Dominican Republic, were interviewed after receiving treatment at a visiting health clinic run by WOH. The goal of this exit interview was to determine motivating factors for seeking care from a medical mission trip. A total of twelve questions were asked, four of which are discussed here. The questions were broad and assessed the patients' need for medical treatment and what services they value in a health care provider.

Exit interviews were conducted on a pilot number of patients and data was gathered about motivations for seeking care and barriers to treatment.



## BACKGROUND OF WAVES OF HEALTH

Waves of Health volunteers on their 20<sup>th</sup> trip to Dajabon, Dominican Republic, in November 2018. Through biannual trips, Waves of Health is able to provide primary care medical services to thousands of people during each trip. The team consists of physicians, physician assistants, pharmacists, medical students, nurses, EMT personnel, translators, and technical support. Dr. Chris Boni (top center) founded the organization in 2007. He is an avid surfer and named the organization after his two passions: surfing and health care. He still surfs off the coast of the DR each trip.

## METHODS

A pilot exit interview was conducted on 70 patients at three different temporary clinic locations organized by WOH during the November 2018 trip. In the interview, qualitative data was gathered regarding patients' experience with health care and barriers that keep them from getting proper treatment. The exit interview aimed to gather data on what types of patients come to traveling medical missions, what services these patients most need, and where patients typically go for their medical services.

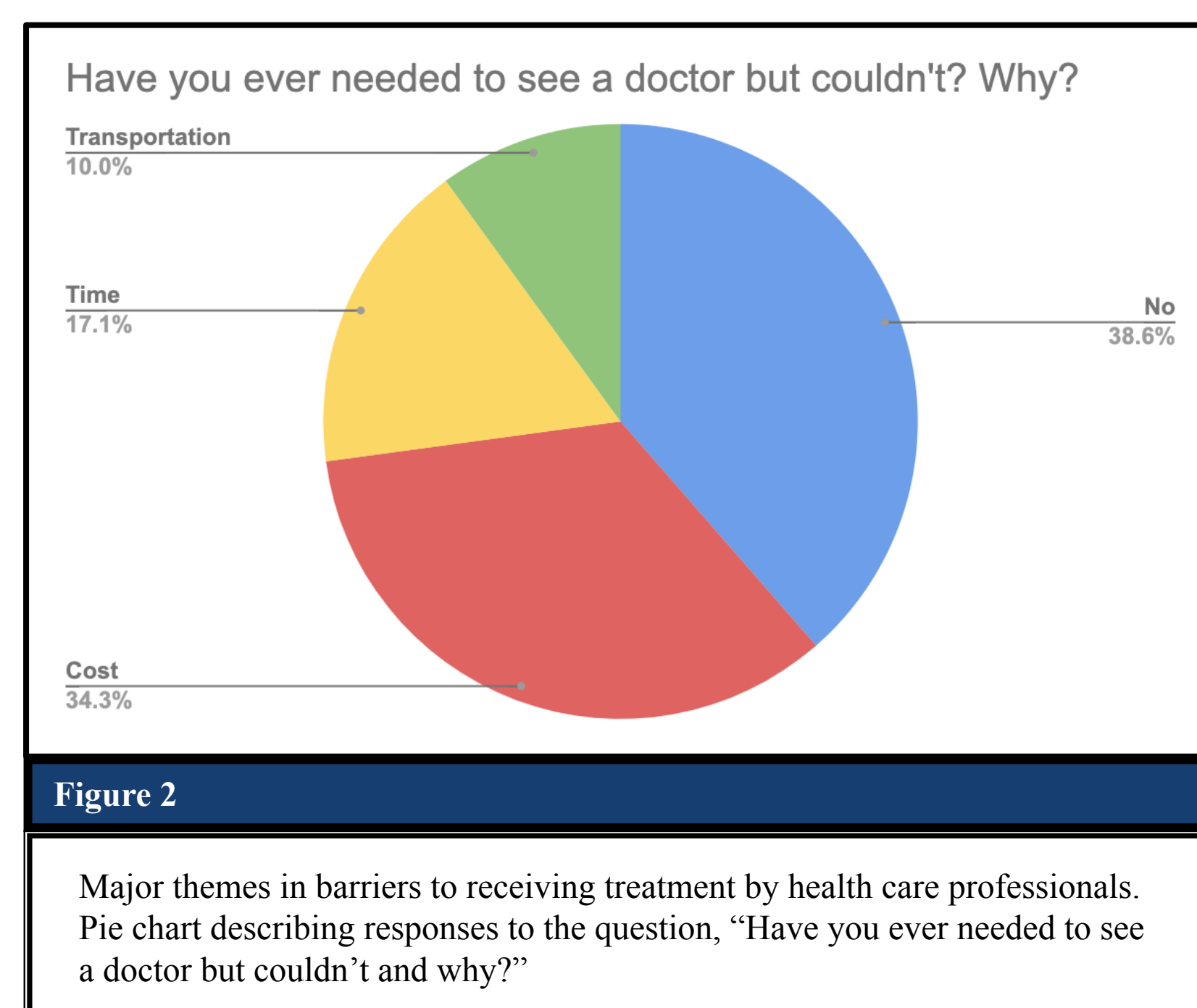
The exit interview addressed these four topics:

- Whether the patient needed to see a doctor but could not and why
- The most important service the patient received at WOH
- Where the patient goes for health care when WOH is not there
- What services the patient needed that WOH was not able to provide

Responses to these topics allow us to identify themes about motivating factors for patients seeking treatment at the WOH clinics.



Figure 1  
An interview being conducted by a medical student and translator



## CONCLUSIONS

Many people WOH treats make little or no money. Cost is the major barrier to treatment. An organization where a patient can be seen by a physician, counseled, and prescribed treatment/medications at no cost is vital. The clinics organized by WOH are approximately a five-hour bus ride from the nearest major city where treatment is available. Transportation to and from these remote towns is sparse and expensive. WOH and other organizations need to be cognizant of this and adjust their treatment to patients who are rarely seen by physicians. Patients who rarely receive care have need for treatment regimens that can be followed well beyond the medical mission trip (ex. blood glucometers, lenses, joint braces, and an extended supply of proper medications). Organizations must be aware of limitations to their treatments and how to provide the appropriate remedies in the lack of procedural care.

## RESULTS

Forty-three of the patients interviewed (61%) reported a time in the past year when they needed to see a doctor but were unable to. Reasons were varied, but three major themes emerged: cost of health care, transportation, and time restraints. Fifty-nine patients (84%) reported a public clinic/hospital as their place of treatment when/if they need it. This is distinctly different from a private clinic which does not rely on government funding. Fifty-one patients (73%) reported medication as the most important service they received from WOH. The next most common themes were pediatric care (13%) and medical advice/education (10%). Twenty-nine patients reported needing something that WOH could not provide. However, after review, only eight needed treatments were truly not available. The remainder of treatments were provided by WOH but possibly not warranted for that patient and therefore not prescribed by the physician. The major treatments that WOH could not provide were prescription lenses and procedures such as dermatologic nevus removal and joint intervention.

## REFERENCES

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