

# The Joys and Challenges of Caring for Older Adults by Primary Care Physicians: Results of Focus Groups in Western North Carolina

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**Objectives:** Primary care physicians (PCPs) are caring for a higher volume of older adults as our population ages. We elicited regional PCPs' feelings on the joys and challenges of caring for older adults in order to help design future interventions in primary care.

**Methods:** We conducted focus groups using a semi-structured interview guide with 20 PCPs from six practices in our 16-county region. Audio tapes were transcribed and de-identified; thematic analysis was performed. Authors reviewed transcripts to identify overarching themes, and reached consensus on themes and exemplary quotes.

**Results:** PCPs reported joys as: the interpersonal relationships, the patient stories; keeping patients independent; streamlining medications; and navigating patients through a complex medical system. Challenges were focused around the: medical complexity of patients; intensity of relationships with patients and their families; management of socioeconomic issues of care; short appointment times; and discomfort and concern with aspects of team-based care.

**Conclusions:** Redesigning primary care for seniors must enhance or maintain the joys while reducing the challenges. The team-based care model can accomplish this if concerns about losing contact with patients and trusting non-physician team members can be addressed. We will need to provide assistance to PCPs to gain competencies and comfort with team-based care.

Key words: Geriatrics, Primary Care, Provider Perceptions, Focus Groups, Qualitative Research