

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DELAY IN THE RETURN OF OUTPATIENT MEDICAL RECORD FILES AT THE PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER LAKOLOGOU

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A B S T R A C T

Medical records are essential documents that serve as a source of information regarding patient identity, medical history, examinations, and treatment. One common problem is the delay in returning medical record files from service units to the medical record unit. This condition can affect service quality, prolong patient waiting time, hinder reporting processes, and increase the risk of document loss. This study aims to identify the factors causing delays in the return of outpatient medical records at Lakologou Community Health Center in 2025. This research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation and interviews with the head of the medical record unit, medical record officers, and polyclinic staff. The results revealed that delays were influenced by five main factors: (1) Man, including staff knowledge, discipline, and responsibility; (2) Method, related to the return procedure and implementation of SOPs; (3) Materials, such as the physical condition of files that are often misplaced; (4) Machines, involving network problems and limited computer facilities; and (5) Money, referring to limited budget for facilities and staff incentives. Based on observations conducted from April to June 2025, 55 files (55.55%) out of 99 outpatient medical records were found to be returned late. Such delays significantly impact both patient service and administrative processes at the health center. Therefore, improvement efforts are required through enhancing staff discipline, optimizing SOP implementation, upgrading facilities, and providing adequate budget support to ensure timely return of medical record files. In conclusion, delays in returning outpatient medical records at Lakologou Health Center are primarily caused by human factors.

Introduction

The Community Health Center (Puskesmas) is a national health organization that functions as a center for community health development. In addition, Puskesmas fosters community participation and provides comprehensive and integrated health services to the community within its working area through various main activities (Siti Hanyfah, 2020). Incomplete medical record documentation has an impact on increasing difficulties in data management. Incomplete data can affect the delivery of information and cause delays in report preparation (Siwayana et al., 2020; Sinta, 2023).

To achieve high-quality medical record management performance, the medical record administration process must be carried out accurately and appropriately, including in the return of medical records (Muchtar & Yulia, 2017). The return of medical records is defined as the process of returning medical records from the service unit that borrowed them back to the medical record unit (Talib, 2021). The unavailability of medical record files can affect patient waiting times, making them longer. The longer the provision of medical record files takes, the more it leads to patient congestion as they wait to obtain their medical record documents (Anisyah Marwah, 2023).

Another possible impact is the loss of medical record files during weekly immunization activities (Supriadi & Damayanti, 2019). The completeness of medical record documentation refers to the thorough filling out of medical records, particularly the medical resume sheet, within 24 hours after the completion of services, with a standard of 100% completion (Kristin, 2023).

Efforts to reduce delays in returning medical record documents have been implemented at Puskesmas Lakologou by establishing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the return of medical records and conducting socialization sessions for all medical and medical record staff regarding the timeframe for returning medical record documents to the medical record unit (Alfiansyah et al., 2023).

The primary cause of delays in returning outpatient medical record documents is the human factor, namely physicians who delay in completing and returning the medical record documents. The impact of such delays includes a decrease in the quality of medical record documentation, longer provision times for medical record files, and obstacles in reporting mortality and morbidity data (Sholikhah et al., 2021).

Although Puskesmas Lakologou already has a specific Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) regulating the timeliness of outpatient medical record returns, irregularities in the return schedule still occur. This condition contributes to delays in returning medical record files from outpatient units to the medical record unit.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive approach. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables studied. The research will be conducted at UPT Puskesmas Lakologou, located in Lakologou Subdistrict, Kokalukuna District, Baubau City. Data collection techniques include observation and interviews, with research instruments consisting of interview guidelines, observation sheets, writing tools, and recording devices. Data obtained will be processed without manipulation. The validity of the data is tested using technique triangulation and source triangulation.

Results and Discussion

The research was conducted through in-depth interviews directly with informants by referring to and utilizing the interview guidelines.

Table 1. Karakteristik Informan

Informan code	Type of informant	Age	Last Education	Position
Informan A	Informan	23	Associate Degree in Medical Records	Medical Ricord Officer
Informan B	Informan	40	Associate Degree in Dental Nursing	Outpatient Clinic Responsible Officer
Informan C	Informan	47	Associate Degree in Midwifery	Outpatient Clinic Responsible Officer
Informasi D	Informan	41	Bachelor of Nursing	Outpatient Clinic Responsible Officer
Trungulasi	Informan Kunci	40	Bachelor of Biology	Head of Medical Record Unit

Source: Primary Data, 2025.

Based on the table, the characteristics of the informants consist of one medical record officer, three outpatient clinic responsible officers, and one head of the medical record unit as the key informant, all of whom are female. The informants in this study include the medical record officer, outpatient clinic responsible officers, and the head of the medical record unit at Lakologou Public Health Center. These informants were selected based on predetermined criteria established by the researcher and their willingness to participate in the interview.

Review Results of Factors Causing Delays in Returning Outpatient Medical Record Files Using the 5M Method

Based on the research conducted at Lakologou Community Health Center regarding the factors causing delays in returning medical record files, the researcher obtained the following findings:

Man (Human Factor)

The following are the results of observations made by the researcher on the Man (Human) aspect related to the process of returning outpatient medical record files from the outpatient department to the Medical Record Unit at Lakologou Community Health Center:

able 2. Observation Results on the "Man" Aspect Regarding the Return of Outpatient Medical Record Files at Lakologou Community Health Center

Observed Aspect	Yes	No
Outpatient staff receive and record incoming outpatient patients in the outpatient registration logbook		
Inpatient staff in new patient data including name, medical record number, and other patient identity details on the medical record form	√	
Doctors record the diagnosis, physical examination results, therapy, and all services provided to the patient in the patient's medical record and sign it	√	
After the patient is discharged from the Health Center, the medical record file is returned to the medical record unit no later than 1x24 hours completely and correctly	√	
There are outpatient medical record documents that are returned late (more than 1x24 hours)	√	
There is a dedicated staff member for returning medical record files	√	
Medical record staff store files according to their medical record number	√	

Source: Primary Data from the Medical Record Unit and Inpatient Unit at Lakologou Community Health Center.

The Man (Human) factor refers to human resources, namely the medical record officers involved in returning outpatient medical record files to the medical record unit (Haqqi et al., 2020).

Based on the research conducted at Lakologou Community Health Center, the Man (Human/HR) factor is one of the causes of delays in returning outpatient medical record files from the outpatient department to the medical record unit. This issue also occurs because nurses do not immediately return the inpatient medical record files to the medical record room when the patient is discharged, causing the files to be misplaced or forgotten to be returned

Method (Procedures/Methods)

The following are the results of observations made by the researcher regarding the Method aspect in the process of returning outpatient medical record files from the outpatient department to the medical record unit at Lakologou Community Health Center:

Table 3. Observation Results of the *Method* Aspect Regarding the Return of Outpatient Medical Record Files at Lakologou Public Health Center

Observed Aspect	Yes	No
There is an SOP for the return of outpatient medical record files.	√	
A return register book for outpatient medical record files is available. File returns are conducted by the responsible medical record officer	√	
Medical record files are stored on the shelves according to the applicable filing arrangement.	√	
The tracer placed in the corresponding order is retrieved and kept for reuse in case the medical record file is borrowed again.	√	

Source: Primary Data, Medical Record Unit and Outpatient Unit, Lakologou Public Health Center

The method factor in the return of outpatient medical record files refers to the application of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for returning medical records. An SOP provides the correct and optimal steps, agreed upon collectively, to carry out various activities (Haqqi et al., 2020).

Based on the findings from the research conducted at Lakologou Public Health Center, the method factor is identified as one of the causes of delayed return of outpatient medical record files. This delay occurs because officers do not immediately return the medical record files to the medical record unit. Instead, they must first write and document information to ensure the files are complete before returning them.

Materials Factor (Facilities and Infrastructure)

The following are the observation results regarding the **materials** aspect, which were conducted by the researcher to examine the return process of outpatient medical record files from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit at Lakologou Public Health Center:

Table 4. Observation Results of the *Materials* Aspect Regarding the Return of Outpatient Medical Record Files at Lakologou Public Health Center

Observed Aspect	Yes	No
Patient medical record files are still manual (paper-based).	√	
A register book for the return of outpatient medical record files is available.	√	
Incomplete medical record files are neatly arranged and placed on a separate designated table.	√	

Source: Primary Data, Medical Record Unit and Outpatient Unit, Lakologou Public Health Center

According to (Haqqi et al., 2020) The incompleteness of the contents of outpatient medical record files is a significant issue, particularly regarding the incomplete filling of forms, especially the absence of doctors' signatures.

Based on the research conducted at Lakologou Public Health Center, it was found that the return process of outpatient medical record files from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit uses a register book. Both the outpatient unit and the medical record unit have their own register books for recording the borrowing and returning of outpatient medical record files. Therefore, the material aspect related to the register books does not contribute to delays in the return of outpatient medical record files.

Machine (Factor)

The following are the observation results regarding the *Machine* aspect, which were conducted by the researcher to assess the return process of outpatient medical record files from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit at Lakologou Public Health Center:

Table 5. Observation Results of the *Machine* Aspect Regarding the Return of Outpatient Medical Record Files at Lakologou Public Health Center

Observed Aspect	Yes	No
Patient medical record files are still manual (paper-based). Files are not returned using recording devices/tools.		√
There is a register book for the return of outpatient medical record files. Completed medical record files are placed in the medical records storage shelves.	√	

Source: Primary Data, Medical Record Unit and Outpatient Unit, Lakologou Public Health Center

The *Machine* factor consists of tools and materials, including facilities and infrastructure. Based on the results obtained, it was stated that the *Machine* factor is not a cause of delays in the return of medical record files. The primary tool used for communication is WhatsApp (Wardhina & Rahmadiliyani, 2022).

Based on the research conducted at Lakologou Public Health Center, the *Machine* factor is not a cause of delays in the return of outpatient medical records from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit. This is because the health center has implemented WhatsApp as a communication medium between the outpatient unit and the medical record installation.

Money (Budget)

The following are the results of observations on the *Money* aspect conducted by the researcher regarding the return of outpatient medical record files from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit at Lakologou Public Health Center.

Table 6. Observation Results of the *Money* Aspect Regarding the Return of Outpatient Medical Record Files at Lakologou Public Health Center

Observed Aspect	Yes	No
There are financial issues related to the return process of medical record files..		√

Source: Primary Data, Medical Record Unit and Inpatient Unit, Lakologou Public Health Center.

According to Anwar et al. (2022), a budget can be defined as a very detailed plan that outlines how resources are expected to be managed by an organization to achieve efficiency in cash expenditures.

Haqqi et al. (2020) state that a budget is a detailed plan concerning the acquisition and use of financial resources and other organizational assets within a specified period.

In the process of returning outpatient medical record files, the *Money* factor is not a cause of delays in returning medical records from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit. This is because the return process does not require a significant amount of funding, and adequate facilities and infrastructure are already available to support the process, such as the register book for borrowing and returning outpatient medical record files at Lakologou Public Health Center

Closing

Statement

The *Man* factor (Human Resources) is a cause of delays in returning outpatient medical record files due to the absence of dedicated personnel responsible for the return process. This results in a lack of discipline among staff, as the return process is inconsistent—sometimes the outpatient staff deliver the files, while at other times, the medical record staff retrieve them themselves.

The *Method* factor, despite the availability of an SOP for returning medical record files, has not been optimally implemented. Non-uniform return procedures across different clinics present challenges, compounded by insufficient supervision and lack of routine evaluation of SOP compliance.

The *Materials* factor (facilities and infrastructure) related to the return process involves the use of a register book. Both the outpatient unit and the medical record unit possess register books for borrowing and returning outpatient medical record files. Therefore, the register book as a material is not a factor contributing to delays in the return process.

The *Machine* factor is not a cause of delays in the return of outpatient medical records from the outpatient unit to the medical record unit at Lakologou Public Health Center. This is because the health center uses WhatsApp as a communication tool between the outpatient unit and the medical record installation.

The *Money* factor is also not a cause of delays in the return process, as returning medical records does not require significant funding. Adequate facilities and infrastructure are already available to support the return process, including the register book for borrowing and returning outpatient medical record files at Lakologou Public Health Center.

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