

Submission Id: 2794

Title

A qualitative study of adolescent perspectives on COVID-19 pandemic: considerations in the provision of primary virtual care

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Child and adolescent health

Presenters

Colleen Grady, , DBA, Caroline Cote, BSc, Naomi Gazendam, Mary Kate Gazendam, MD, CCFP, FCFP, Susan Phillips, Anna Townend

Abstract

Context: Amidst school shutdowns, sheltering in place, and social distancing, the COVID-19 pandemic uniquely affected adolescents. Understanding the experiences of adolescents with respect to social distancing, health changes, information sources and virtual care can inform effective health care for adolescents both during and after the pandemic. Objective: An exploration into their health care experiences during the beginning stage of the pandemic was undertaken to increase knowledge among family physicians to enable adjustments to the provision of care, primarily done virtually. Study Design: This was a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were used to understand the experiences of adolescents using virtual care during the pandemic, the impact of public health restrictions on their health, and their sources of information. Thematic analysis of interviews was conducted using a double-coding technique. Setting: This study took place in a family health team with eight primary care practices. Population studied: Adolescents, aged 14-17 years who had at least one virtual care appointment with their family physician in the first three months of the pandemic were included. Eleven participants were interviewed. Results: Most participants were compliant with social distancing guidelines, motivated by protecting family and community. Participants described both positive and negative impacts on their mental health. Some noted an increase in marijuana use. Sexual activity in pre-pandemic relationships did not change and one participant noted a decrease in casual sexual activity. Participants enjoyed the convenience offered by virtual care but acknowledged privacy and communication challenges. Parents were described as the most trusted source of information about the pandemic. Conclusions: Adolescents primarily look to parents for guidance and the increased family time promoted well-being. Physicians that are able to help adolescents negotiate privacy and mitigate communication challenges are able to provide effective virtual care.