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Title

Access to General Practice during COVID-19-a cross-sectional view of the opinions of adults who use social media

Priority 1 (Research Category)

COVID-19

Presenters

Gabriela Mineva, BSc, Irene Kiroplis, Bethany Rogers, Dana Pearl, Yasmin Abohalima, BSc, Patrick O'Donnell, MBChB, MSc, AOIBHIN MCCOOL, peter hayes, Monika Volz, , BMSc

Abstract

Background/Aim: Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual consultations have become commonplace, and access to healthcare more complex. The study was designed to examine the impact COVID-19 has had on access to general practice care in Ireland.

Methods: A 25-question online survey was designed in Qualtrics®. Adult patients of Irish general practices were recruited via social media between October 2020 and February 2021 and volunteered their opinions.

Results: 670 persons participated. Half of all doctor-patient consultations were now completed virtually-predominantly via telephone. Overall, 497 (78%) participants accessed their healthcare teams as scheduled, and without disruption. 18% of participants (n=104) reported difficulty in accessing their long-term medications; those who are younger, and those who typically attend general practice quarterly or more, were associated most with this disruption ($p < 0.05$). Fifty-nine instances where a new health concern was subject to an appointment cancellation or rescheduling were reported.

Conclusions: Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Irish general practice has maintained its schedule for appointments in 78% of cases despite the challenges of the pandemic. Half of consultations were provided virtually; teleconsultation use was very infrequent. Maintaining the supply chain for long-term medications for patients remains a challenge during a pandemic. Authors accept that study participants were confined to those who use social media. A protocol may need to be designed by each practice to optimize the continuation of care and of medication schedules during any future pandemics.