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Title

Exploration of Rural Family Physicians' lived-experiences of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic

Priority 1 (Research Category)

COVID-19

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: The pervasiveness of the impact by COVID-19 has been felt across all aspects of Canadian society. In attempts to circumvent rises in unprecedented complexity, the pandemic has prompted varying responses from the afflicted healthcare systems in Canada. However, there is a scarcity of insights into the various parameters and complexities endured by Canadian rural physicians and rural healthcare institutions. Objective: This paper aims to explore the endured intricacies and difficulties by rural healthcare institutions and Canadian rural physicians during the pandemic. Study Design: The research was predicated on community-based participatory methodology which facilitated engagement among community members in all aspects of research; ranging from formulating the research question to analyzing data. Data are collected through in-depth telephone interviews; data collected was stopped upon reaching saturation. Setting: Rural and Remote communities in Canada. Population of study: Rural family physicians with at least one year of clinical practice experience. Recruitment: Rural family physicians are recruited via recruitment emails forwarded through the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada list server. The sampling methods used were purposive (e.g., years of practice) and snowball sampling. Analysis: All interviews are transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed. Results: This study illustrates the findings of five major categories underpinning Rural Family Physicians' lived-experiences: 1- Shifting to virtual care: double edge sword; 2- Improving accessibility or damaging care; 3-Healthcare personnel staffing shortage; 4- Coping with the pandemic guidelines; and 5-Work fatigue and pandemic fatigue. Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic has induced significant degrees of complexities on the experiences and livelihood of rural physicians. This study illuminates the lesser-known effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which is heavily impacting the infrastructure of rural healthcare.