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Title

Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Medical Office Assistants Working in Family Medicine Clinics in Ontario

Priority 1 (Research Category)

COVID-19

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) are front line workers and the most accessible member of the team for patients seeking primary care. MOAs, also known as receptionists, clerks, secretaries and medical administrative assistants have direct contact with patients. Historically, their contributions to primary care have been unrecognized and undervalued. The COVID-19 pandemic put pressure on existing roles and systems in primary care. MOAs likely made significant contributions to organizing new processes of providing and triaging primary care during this time. Objective: To explore the experiences of MOAs working in primary care practices during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of MOAs and family physicians(FPs) who worked with MOAs during this period. Study Design and Analysis: Qualitative study using Constructivist Grounded Theory. Seventeen individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with MOAs and FPs. Setting: Province of Ontario, Canada. Population Studied: MOAs and FPs. Intervention/Instrument: N/A Outcome Measures: N/A Results: MOAs' many responsibilities in primary care intensified during the pandemic. MOAs leveraged their healthcare system knowledge and therapeutic relationships with patients to reduce patient distress. The MOA-FP relationship was strengthened when FPs recognized MOAs' critical role on primary care teams, expressed concern for their welfare and included MOAs in pandemic planning and educational sessions. Conclusions: The ability of MOAs to adapt to new systems and respond to high patient needs during the pandemic appeared to be positively influenced by their relationships with patients and FPs. This study addresses a significant gap in the healthcare literature concerning the important role of MOAs.

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