WONCA ABSTRACT

Studying the impact of primary care visits and uptake of virtual care around the world through the International Consortium of Primary Care Big Data Researchers (INTRePID)

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Background and Purpose

Prompted by the global pandemic, family physician researchers from 9 different countries around the world joined together to form the International Consortium of Primary Care Big Data Researchers (INTRePID). The first objective was to compare and contrast visit volume and the uptake of virtual care in primary care settings in Australia, Canada, China, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, UK and the US. These nine countries had variable COVID-19 prevalence and variable approaches to public health prevention measures instituted.

Methods

A retrospective analysis of primary care physician visit volume and proportion of virtual visits in 2019 and 2020 was performed using either electronic medical record data or physician billing claims data in each of the nine countries. Analysis was performed in individual countries and aggregated data was shared centrally.

Results

Face to face visits decreased in 2020 for all INTRePID countries. Overall visit volume decreased in 2020 for all countries accept Australia. Canada was the country with the greatest uptake in virtual care post pandemic onset. Uptake of virtual care was negligible in Singapore and China whereas accounted for more than 50% of primary care physician visits in Canada, Australia and the UK in the weeks immediately after the pandemic onset.

Conclusions

We found that the changes in visit volume and uptake in virtual care was independent of COVID-19 incidence and the extent of public health prevention measures. It is possible to perform international comparative studies in primary care using big data. Further impacts of the pandemic on primary care patients and delivery around the world are subject for future study.