



CanCOVID Speaker Series

Event Summary



Harnessing the Potential of Primary Care & Addressing Problems Exacerbated by COVID-19: Findings from the PUPPY Study

Speaker

Emily Gard Marshall, BA, MSc, PhD

Objective

To summarize the Speaker Series presentation on 'Harnessing the Potential of Primary Care & Addressing Problems Exacerbated by COVID-19: Findings from the PUPPY Study.' The aim of this talk was to provide an overview of the 'Problems Coordinating and Accessing Primary Care for Attached and Unattached Patients in a Pandemic Year' (PUPPY) study that evaluates (using mixed methods) how the pandemic impacted primary care provision, primary care access, and to identify strategies for improving access across Canada.

Key Messages

- Strong primary care results in better health outcomes and reduced disparities addressing the social determinants of health and quadruple aims. Primary care challenges in Canada pre-COVID-19 included access barriers, growing numbers of Canadians unable to find a primary care provider, impediments to practice change, and inadequate access to data for research.
- COVID-19 response brought significant rapid changes to primary care that requires study. The PUPPY study design mitigates pervasive challenges in primary care research through our team structure, multiple data sources, and knowledge translation strategy.
- During the first wave of COVID-19, we saw significant declines in primary care access and provision, including a shift to virtual care and the suspension of non-urgent healthcare services.
- The number of specialists encounters also plummeted, placing additional burden on primary care providers to manage their patients while awaiting referrals for tests, imaging, and specialists' care.
- Virtual primary care encounters spiked to compensate for the decline of in-person visits. Patients reported difficulty accessing primary care, despite primary care physicians reportedly keeping their practices open. Pharmacists played a major role in meeting some patients' needs due to their accessibility and expansion of their scope of practice before and during the pandemic.

Implications/Next Steps

- Virtual care offers an opportunity for timely primary care access, however, concerns regarding which visits are appropriate for virtual care and equitable access should be addressed. The consequences of delayed and foregone primary and specialist care during the pandemic may have long term population health consequences. The expanded role of pharmacists in supporting patient care needs warrants further study. [Click here for more information.](#)

[Click here to view the recording of this event.](#)