

## **Besrouer Center for Global Family Medicine**

### **Poster Presentation Besrouer/FMF 2020**

**Title:** Chronic Disease Management during the COVID-19 pandemic

#### **Authors:**

- 1) Baraa Alghalyini\*, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FCFPC, Department of Family & Community Medicine, Alfaisal University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- 2) Catherine Ji\*, MD MSc CCFP, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto, Canada

#### **Context**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the delivery of all healthcare services as outpatient visits and investigations have been cancelled or shifted towards telemedicine to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Prevention, diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer, are central to family medicine. The objective of this poster is to share our experiences, as family physicians providing comprehensive primary care and urgent care in Canada and Saudi Arabia, regarding the lessons learned from chronic disease management during the pandemic.

#### **PIVOT Points**

In both Canada and Saudi Arabia, appointments were initially transformed into phone consultations, and overall volume of patients dropped significantly due to lockdown measures and fear of healthcare facilities. Patients presented to urgent care facilities with more severe illness decompensation than usual due to delays in seeking care. Other factors complicating chronic disease management include decreased physical activity, diet changes (especially during the fasting month of Ramadan in Saudi Arabia), financial difficulties from unemployment, lack of medications supply, poor health technology literacy and access in elderly and marginalized populations.

#### **Lessons Learned**

In this challenging context, leveraging health education principles, such as patient-centered care, shared decision making, patient empowerment, and health technology have become crucial to managing chronic diseases remotely. Most patients embraced learning to use new digital health tools regularly to communicate with healthcare providers and monitor their symptoms at home. Helping patients get access to blood pressure machines, glucometers, oximeters, and using videoconference instead of phone consultations were important facilitators to virtual care management. More has to be done however to equitably provide care to the elderly and marginalized populations in all settings as telemedicine is becoming an integral part of healthcare in the ongoing pandemic context.

#### **Conclusion**

The pandemic has offered an opportunity for family physicians all around the world to enhance health education and further empower patients to manage chronic diseases and mitigate indirect consequences of COVID-19 on the healthcare system. It also catalyzed a digital health revolution with the integration of virtual tools to improve the care experience and efficiency for both providers and patients.