

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

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

#### **Managing an epidemic of fear: worry during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya and Canada.**

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#### **Context**

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed major demands on individual and collective mental health around the world, including that of family physicians. Dr. Henry Owuor is a family physician at a level 4 hospital in rural Western Kenya who works integrating mental health care into primary care. Dr. Monica Kidd is a family physician working at a multidisciplinary health care clinic in the Blackfoot Confederacy of southern Alberta, and also providing prenatal and intrapartum care in a group practice setting in Calgary.

#### **PIVOT points**

Both of our practices were profoundly affected by the pandemic. Due to lockdowns in both countries, our patients had to wait longer to see us, and anxiety was common. Patients had many unanswerable questions about the evolving global scenario and what it might mean for their futures. Because many diagnostic and surgical services were suspended, patients had to wait for indefinite periods to resolve their health concerns. Virtual visits were widely adopted in Canada in an attempt to reach isolated patients, but not in Kenya.

#### **Lessons Learned**

While virtual care provided access to basic care when face-to-face interactions were difficult or not recommended, it was not universally accessible for people in rural areas and those otherwise lacking to phones and computers; nor did virtual visits provide the same opportunity to explore sensitive matters or perform physical exams. Health care providers in both settings struggled to provide reassurance and guidance to patients while negotiating uncertainty in their own lives during a time when no community in the world was left unaffected. Transparent contingency planning from medical and political leaders helped physicians in their work; sudden changes of policies were destabilizing.

#### **Conclusions**

While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demanded innovation from primary care providers in Kenya and Canada, it has increased anxiety among both primary care patients and health care providers, and presents major challenges to providing patients timely and effective mental health care.