

SUMMARY

Introduction. Among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a sudden reduction in access to primary healthcare and an urgent need for an alternative form of health advice in the form of teleconsultation.

Objective. To learn the opinions of beneficiaries and service providers and to identify factors determining the manner of providing teleconsultations in the field of primary health care in selected counties of the Podkarpackie Province during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Materials and methods. The study covered 468 beneficiaries and 9 physicians in five primary care providers in four randomly selected counties of the Podkarpackie Province, who used at least one primary care physician teleconsultation between March 12, 2020 and September 2022. The research method was a diagnostic survey and the research tools were: the Abbreviated Mental Fitness Test according to HODGKINSON-AMTS, an original questionnaire, the Satisfaction with Life Scale-SWLS and the Patient Expectations List-PRF.

Results. The most common form of consultation with a primary care physician during the COVID-19 pandemic, used by 302 (64.5%) beneficiaries, was a teleconsultation in the form of a telephone consultation. The resolution of the main health problem by the doctor during the teleconsultation, in the opinion of the surveyed primary care beneficiaries, was significantly dependent on gender ($\chi^2= 13.48$; $\phi=0.17$; $p=0.004$), current health status ($\chi^2= 32.85$; $V=0.15$; $p=0.001$); the presence of chronic diseases such as hypertension ($\chi^2= 24.84$; $\phi=0.23$; $p=0.0001$) and diabetes ($\chi^2= 9.25$; $\phi=0.14$; $p=0.026$). There was a significant correlation between the life satisfaction of the surveyed primary care beneficiaries and their opinion on their satisfaction with the most common form of consultation with a primary care physician during the COVID-19 pandemic in the form of teleconsultation ($\chi^2= 232.38$; $V=0.35$; $p=0.0001$) and satisfaction with face-to-face consultations ($\chi^2=182.80$; $V=0.31$; $p=0.0001$). The opinion of the surveyed primary care beneficiaries regarding the likelihood of recommending teleconsultation to a loved one was significantly dependent on gender ($\chi^2= 21.25$; $\phi=0.21$; $p=0.012$) and current health status ($\chi^2= 142.58$; $V=0.28$; $p=0.001$).

Conclusions. The pandemic caused almost twice as many people to use teleconsultations in the form of telephone consultations than in the form of face-to-face consultations with a primary care physician. The main benefits of teleconsultations for primary care beneficiaries were the resolution of their main problem by a primary care physician, the extension of chronic medication, obtaining a referral for tests and/or to a specialist, obtaining advice and health education, and all information regarding their health status. People using teleconsultation had low to average life satisfaction, were more likely to say that their health problem was resolved during the teleconsultation or that they were able to make an appointment with a doctor, found teleconsultation to be effective and comparable to a face-to-face visit, and would recommend teleconsultation to a loved one.

Keywords: teleconsultation primary health care, primary care physician, primary care beneficiary