

Project Title:

Patterns of Specialty Medical Referral – Analysis of a Primary Health Care Electronic Medical Record Database

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Key Messages

- Among 24,856 patients who visited one of 25 family physicians in southwestern Ontario between April 2007 and March 2008, the rate of referral to specialty physicians was 455 / 1000 patients / year. The most common specialist referrals were General Surgery (61/1000 patients / year); Obstetrics and Gynecology (41 / 1000 patients / year) and Orthopedic Surgery (41 / 1000 patients / year). The rate varied by patient gender, patient age, family physician practice location (rural/urban), consultant specialty, and correlated with the number of family physician visits.
- For all referrals to a medical specialist from these family physicians between October 2005 and March 2008 the mean wait time was 74 days (median 47 days, range 0 – 858 days) and this varied by consultant specialty.
- There is a substantial literature published in the last decade describing referral patterns and wait times, but extensive variability in study methodology and the health system settings from which studies arose make comparisons between studies problematic.
- Electronic medical record databases hold promise to enable a richer understanding of referral patterns and wait times in the future.