

Impact of telephone triage on access to primary care for people living with multiple long-term health conditions: rapid evaluation

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

A telephone triage system is when a patient calls their general practice to make an appointment and is told that a doctor or nurse will call them back. When the doctor or nurse calls back, they listen to the patient's problem, ask questions and assess their condition. Depending on the telephone triage assessment, an urgent or routine appointment may then be set up (over the telephone, online or face to face) or the doctor or nurse may recommend an alternative solution.

This study aimed to find out how using telephone triage in primary care affects patients differently if they have more than one long-term health condition (e.g. diabetes, asthma, depression or mental health problems). For example, a patient living with more than one health condition may require a different approach to their care or contact their general practice more frequently.

In the past, patients' access to primary care was predominantly through face-to-face consultations, but there has been a gradual move toward using telephone triage at general practices. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have led to a rapid increase in the use of telephone triage.

We think that this work is important because it tells us that the change to telephone triage approaches in primary care that occurred in March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to have led to large inequalities in whether or not someone living with multiple long-term health conditions is able to see their general practitioner when they need to, and how quickly they are able to see their general practitioner.

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