

Supplementary Material

COVID-19 challenges faced by general practitioners in Australia: a survey study conducted in March 2021

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Appendix S1. COVID-19 challenges faced by general practitioners (GPs): Survey Questionnaire

The following questions are part of a University of Sydney study led by GPs and public health researchers, investigating challenges experienced by GPs during COVID-19. If you are a GP and can spare 5-10 minutes, we would appreciate your views on how to better support GPs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To read more information about this study, please download the [Participant Information Statement](#)

I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Statement and consent to take part in this research project as described.

- Yes [*proceed to survey questions on next page*]
- No [*survey ends and no data is collected*]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. If you work at more than one practice, please answer the following questions for the practice at which you spend the majority of your time.

1. With regard to COVID-19, what are the THREE main issues/requests that your patients present with in your clinic (select 3)
 - a. Asking for advice about testing for COVID-19
 - b. Asking whether symptoms indicate need for testing
 - c. Organising testing
 - d. Giving advice about whether or not certain activities may be associated with risk of catching COVID-19
 - e. Anxiety and mental health issues associated with COVID-19
 - f. Anxiety and mental health issues associated with lockdown/restrictions
 - g. Anxiety and mental health issues associated with the financial impact of the pandemic
 - h. Asking for information about the COVID-19 vaccinations
 - i. Other (please specify)
2. With regard to COVID-19 related duties that are not directly patient-facing, which occupies most of your time? (select one)
 - a. Organising technology for telehealth
 - b. Chasing up results
 - c. Managing staff OHS
 - d. Other (please specify)
3. With regard to COVID-19, to what extent are you concerned about the following issues at your practice? (1=not at all concerned to 10=extremely concerned, 11=not applicable)
 - a. Obtaining PPE/ lack of access to PPE
 - b. Access to COVID-19 testing
 - c. Turnaround time of COVID-19 results
 - d. Lack of clear advice from government about lockdown/restrictions
 - e. Lack of clear advice about clinical criteria for testing/referral
 - f. Financial stress due to drop in normal patient numbers or the sustainability of my practice
 - g. My own health/ being exposed to COVID-19 in my practice
 - h. Patients ignoring pre-screening/showing up to clinic with flu-like symptoms
 - i. Safety issues for colleagues and family (e.g. spreading illness to my family)
 - j. Patients not attending or delaying appointments for essential care due to fear of catching COVID-19
 - k. Inadequate assessment of patients via telehealth
 - l. Communication with COVID-19 clinics and tertiary care settings
 - m. Effect of pandemic on my patients (e.g. financial impact, international students)
 - n. Willingness of my patients to accept a COVID-19 vaccination
 - o. Other (please specify)

4. If you had to choose, which of these concerns needs to be prioritised the most? (Select up to three)
 - a. Obtaining PPE/ lack of access to PPE
 - b. Access to COVID-19 testing
 - c. Turnaround time of COVID-19 results
 - d. Lack of clear advice from government about rules
 - e. Lack of clear advice about clinical criteria for testing/referral
 - f. Financial stress due to drop in normal patient numbers or the sustainability of my practice
 - g. My own health/ being exposed to COVID-19 in my practice
 - h. Patients ignoring pre-screening/showing up to clinic with flu-like symptoms
 - i. Safety issues for colleagues and family (e.g. spreading illness to my family)
 - j. Patients not attending or delaying appointments for essential care due to fear of catching COVID-19
 - k. Inadequate assessment of patients via telehealth
 - l. Communication with COVID-19 clinics and tertiary care settings
 - m. Effect of pandemic on my patients (e.g. financial impact, international students)
 - n. Willingness of my patients to accept a COVID-19 vaccination
 - o. Other (please specify)

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how serious of a public health threat do you think COVID-19 is currently in Australia? (1=no threat at all to 10=a very serious public health threat)

6. How commonly do you encounter patients who severely underestimate the risks of COVID-19? e.g. think it is all a hoax
 - a. Very common (multiple times in a day),
 - b. Somewhat common (once a day)
 - c. Not very common (a few times a week),
 - d. Never

7. How commonly do you encounter patients who severely overestimate the risks of COVID-19? e.g. are afraid to leave the house
 - a. Very common (multiple times in a day),
 - b. Somewhat common (once a day)
 - c. Not very common (a few times a week),
 - d. Never

8. From the following list, please pick the three most useful sources of information about COVID-19 (please choose three)
 - a) State govt leader
 - b) State dept of health
 - c) Federal govt leader
 - d) Federal dept of health
 - e) Local Primary Health Networks
 - f) Local Health Districts
 - g) Health Pathways
 - h) Pen CS software (e.g. CAT4 and Topbar)
 - i) RACGP/ACRRM
 - j) AMA
 - k) WHO
 - l) CDC
 - m) Social media
 - n) Other (please specify)

9. What sources of information have been the most useful for educating your patients? (please specify)

10. Are there any particular aspects about COVID-19 that you would like more education or resources about? (Choose as many as applicable)

- a. Testing eligibility and process
- b. Viral transmission and spread
- c. Symptoms/diagnosis
- d. treatment
- e. Rules and requirements
- f. How to access PPE
- g. Staff training and support
- h. COVID-19 vaccination
- i. Other (please specify)

11. How much do you agree with the following statements - 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

- a. The threat of COVID-19 is greatly exaggerated
- b. Herd immunity would be beneficial for COVID-19 and this fact is covered up
- c. The government restrictions are stronger than needed

12. To what extent do you feel the needs of GPs are being considered in the response to COVID by governments (state and federal)?

- a. a lot
- b. somewhat
- c. a little
- d. not at all

13. What do you feel the role of GPs should be in supporting the government's response to COVID-19? (free text)

14. What role do you think GPs should play in COVID-19 management? (select all that apply)

- a. Triage patients for possible COVID-19 symptoms
- b. Providing referrals to patients to access COVID-19 test centres
- c. Conducting COVID-19 tests
- d. Supporting contact tracing
- e. Providing education about how COVID-19 spreads
- f. Providing education about when to get tested
- g. Providing education about prevention
- h. Providing patients with reliable sources of information
- i. Correcting misunderstandings
- j. Modelling best practice hygiene (e.g. washing hands, masks)
- k. Modelling best practice physical distancing (e.g. spacing chairs)
- l. Encouraging continued engagement for non-COVID conditions
- m. Providing mental health screening and referrals
- n. Supporting uptake of COVID-19 vaccines
- o. Other (please specify)

15. Are there any other important points, challenges or issues you would like to raise in relation to practicing during the pandemic?

16. Are there any other important points, challenges or concerns you would like to raise in relation to the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out in Australia?

[Demographics]

17. Are you a:

- a. General Practitioner
- b. General Practitioner Registrar
- c. Other (Please specify)

18. How many years have you been practicing?

- a) 1-4 years
- b) 5-9 years
- c) 10-14 years
- d) >15 years

19. What is your date of birth? _____

20. What is your gender

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Other (free text)
- d. Prefer not to say

21. In what country did you undertake your medical training?

- a. Australia
- b. Other (free text)

22. What is the postcode of your primary professional practice? _____

23. What is the primary location of your professional practice?

- a. Inner city
- b. Outer urban
- c. Regional
- d. Rural

24. How would you describe your practice?

- a. Primarily bulk billing
- b. Primarily private billing
- c. Other (free text)

25. Approx. how many patients do you see per week? _____

Thanks very much for your participation! A summary of the results will be distributed in the Health-ed newsletter by September 2021.

Table S1. GP's perceived role in COVID-19 management (select all that apply)

	N	%
Supporting uptake of COVID-19 vaccines	228	77.3
Providing patients with reliable sources of information	210	71.2
Correcting misunderstandings	208	70.5
Providing education about prevention	197	66.8
Modelling best practice hygiene	193	65.4
Encouraging continued engagement for non-COVID-19 conditions	189	64.1
Providing mental health screening & referrals	188	63.7
Providing education about when to get tested	184	62.4
Providing education about how COVID-19 spreads	178	60.3
Modelling best practice physical distancing	174	59.0
Providing referrals to patients to access COVID-19 test centres	163	55.3
Triaging patients for possible COVID-19 symptoms	155	52.5
Supporting contact tracing	127	43.1
Conducting COVID-19 tests	75	25.4
Other (free text)	7	2.7

Table S2. Themes and corresponding quotes for free-text question: “Are there any other important points, challenges or concerns you would like to raise in relation to practicing during the pandemic?” (n=78 responses)

Theme	Example quote/s	Frequency n (%)*
Dissatisfaction with the government response	<i>“Highly stressful (but glad we live in Australia) would like to be feel that GPs are seen, by government, as asset and recognised for our role rather than used and abused.”</i> <i>“Poor quality and inconsistent rule changes, incompetence of the state government in managing the pandemic.”</i>	12 (15%)
Benefits of telehealth	<i>“Telehealth is a great step to advance, made consultation easier for patient to access without the need to leave home and stuck in traffic.”</i> <i>“Continue telehealth MBS items.”</i>	9 (12%)
Changes to and impact on practice, including financial	<i>“It's been a very challenging 12 months for GPs and will continue and probably worsen as we navigate into Covid vaccines this year.”</i> <i>“General practice businesses are financially vulnerable - I don't think this is understood by the community.”</i>	9 (12%)
Better communication and support from the government needed	<i>“Lack of clear advice to health professions and public.”</i> <i>“Need early warning of any local covid cases.”</i>	8 (10%)
Other	<i>“By its changing nature (due to change in understanding as well as mutations of the virus itself), it is an extremely challenging disease.”</i>	8 (10%)
Mental load on health professionals	<i>“The importance of recognising the mental stresses on medical staff.”</i> <i>“It is exhausting. Has been going now for 12 months. No near end in sight - we are front line and have to continue to play a major role in keeping the community safe and reduce the risk of local transmission by continuing to be vigilant and diligent in our multifaceted role.”</i>	7 (9%)
Challenges with telehealth	<i>“Telehealth is very helpful but is not adequate for many services provided in General Practice.”</i>	7 (9%)
Delivery of COVID-19 vaccines	<i>“GPs should be handling a big amount of the vaccinations.”</i>	7 (9%)
Social, economic and mental impact of pandemic on patients	<i>“Generalised anxiety in adults and children soaring.”</i> <i>“Economic and mental health crisis.”</i>	6 (8%)
Issues with masks	<i>“Difficulty in issuing letter of support for not wearing mask.”</i> <i>“More obligatory use of masks on public transport and in shopping centers and policing.”</i>	4 (5%)
COVID-19 vaccine for GPs	<i>“Not being an accredited practice and having been a GP for 50 years, my concern is when and if I will get the covid vax.”</i> <i>“It may be a challenge for some GPs to continue practicing when vaccines are introduced if they are not able to have the vaccines e.g. for medical reasons, pregnancy etc”</i>	4 (5%)
Care for chronic conditions delayed	<i>“Chronic conditions were lost for recalls. Blood tests and follow ups are lost during the pandemic. It will take some time to get back to where we were.”</i>	3 (4%)
Lack of quality PPE	<i>“Prioritise providing best PPE's to doctors and nurses to preserve those who help others to battle covid.”</i>	3 (4%)
Non specific/ unclear	<i>“Quarantine.”</i>	3 (4%)

*Note, some free-text responses fitted into more than one theme, the % is out of the 78 participants who answered this free-text question.