

Physician referrals for pediatric weight management in Alberta. A preliminary analysis of administrative data

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Background

- Many children in Canada do not benefit from multidisciplinary (MCC) care for pediatric weight management (PWM) due to low:
 - Referral
 - Enrollment
 - Retention
- Data on rates and predictors of referral are limited



Objectives

- Characterize referring physicians and the children they referred to MCC for PWM in Alberta
- Determine the proportion of eligible physicians in Alberta who referred children to MCC

Methods

- *Study design:*
 - Cross-sectional
- *Participants:*
 - All family physicians and pediatricians practicing in Alberta
 - All 2–18 year olds with a BMI \geq 85th percentile referred to MCC between April 2013 and July 2017
- *Data sources:*
 - Standardized referral forms from Alberta Health Services (children data)
 - Publically-available, online sources and the Alberta College of Physicians (physician data)



Main Results

- Of all eligible physicians in Alberta, 15.9% (912/5,736) referred children to MCC.
- Pediatricians referred 2,091 (69.8%) children, family physicians referred 874 (29.2%) children, and other medical specialists referred 30 (1.0%) children.
- Most referring physicians were female (n=534; 58.6%) and practiced in urban areas (n=824; 90.4%).
- Children who were referred varied by age group (0–5 year old: n=276, 9.2%; 6–12 year old: n=1,644, 54.9%; 13–17 years old: n=1,074, 35.9%) and weight status (overweight: n=58, 2.0%; obesity: n=355, 12.3%; severe obesity: n=2,473, 85.6%).

Conclusions

- Few family physicians and pediatricians in Alberta referred children for pediatric weight management
- Strategies to enhance referral should:
 - Enhance physicians' awareness of the value of referring children
 - Increase referrals of younger and less overweight children who are more likely to benefit from treatment than their older and higher-BMI counterparts



Examining physician-related predictors of referral

Acknowledgements

Supervisor

Dr. Geoff Ball

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Chenhui Peng

Andrea Eaton

Maryam Kebbe

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Alison Connors

Katerina Maximova

Nicholas Spence

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