

# E-Consult News

## August 2020

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### Issue Contents

- [Specialist Virtual Communications Increased During Pandemic](#)
  - [Telehealth Critical to California's Underserved Communities During and Beyond the Pandemic](#)
  - [E-Consults Beneficial for Inpatient Care](#)
  - [The COVID-19 Pandemic is "A Defining Moment for Pediatric Primary Care Telehealth"](#)
  - [CMS Proposed Physician Fee Schedule for 2021 Continues E-Consult and Expands Telehealth Coverage](#)
  - [August 20th E-Consult Workgroup Webinar: Impact of COVID-19 on E-Consult Use](#)
  - [Save The Date: Annual E-Consult Workshop, November 16th](#)
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### Quality

#### Specialist Virtual Communications Increased During Pandemic



**Multi-County eConsult Initiative**

An [analysis of Inland Empire Health Plan's \(IEHP\) e-consult use](#) before and during the pandemic found that specialists' use of virtual communications to deliver care instead of in-person recommendations increased during the pandemic

because "physicians scrutinized individual cases more keenly and were not as quick to recommend a face-to-face visit." The study reviewed IEHP's e-consult data from February to April 2020, both before and after the issuance of California's stay-at-home order on March 19th. The study found that the percentage of e-consults completed without a face-to-face recommendation increased from 11.1% before the stay-at-home order to 19.5% after it was issued. These results demonstrate how the pandemic has driven "clinicians to make different decisions about referrals and care coordination."

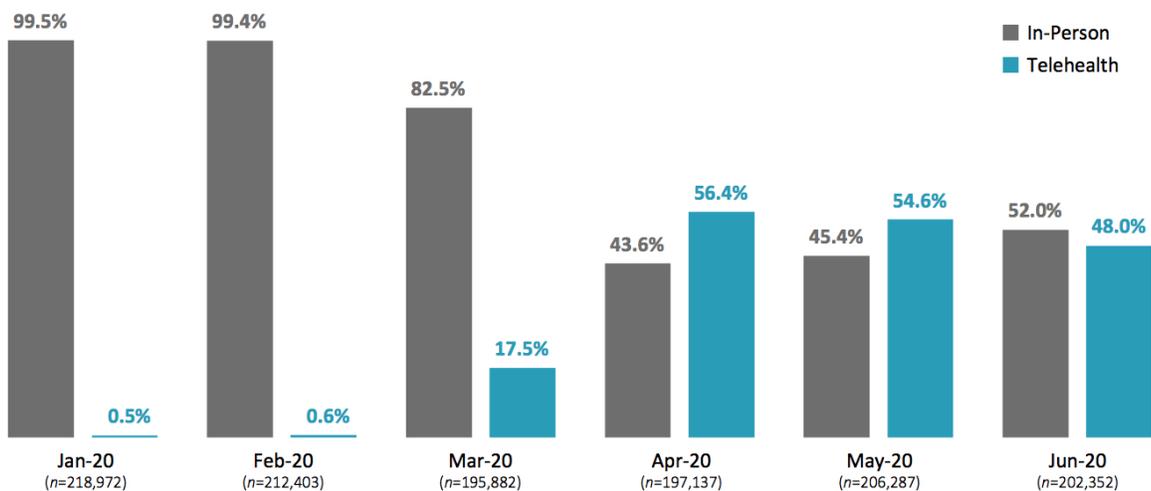
#### Telehealth Critical to California's Underserved Communities During and Beyond the Pandemic

A [California Health Care Foundation \(CHCF\) analysis of care delivery data](#) from OCHIN provides insight into the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on care delivery in California's community health centers. Twenty-nine state health centers that deliver care to 1.3 million patients in underserved communities report that telehealth adoption has increased their patient capacity to between 85 and 90% of pre-COVID levels.

However, the author notes that work remains to ensure community health centers can continue to provide virtual care: "To close existing gaps and increase access to high-quality health care for everyone, policymakers must ensure that safety-net facilities have the tools, infrastructure, and financial support necessary to provide virtual and in-person care throughout and beyond the pandemic."

Figure 3. Percentage of OCHIN's Completed In-Person and Telehealth Encounters, California, January 2020 to June 2020

In California, telehealth encounters increased as in-person encounters declined in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Adoption

### E-Consults Beneficial for Inpatient Care

In recent [study](#), researchers from Rochester Regional Health assessed e-consults' feasibility and utility for allergy and rheumatology inpatient care. Of the 109 inpatient allergy/immunology (A/I) consults, 71.6% were completed through e-consults and 28.4% in-person. Among the requesting providers, 97% reported either excellent or good impressions of e-consults. The authors conclude that during the pandemic inpatient e-consults are an "important strategy to optimize access to inpatient A/I care."

### The COVID-19 Pandemic is "A Defining Moment for Pediatric Primary Care Telehealth"

In [JAMA Pediatrics](#) three pediatricians focus on how telehealth is creating "an opportunity for the pediatric community to define how telehealth...should be used and compensated within primary care now and in the future." The authors state that telehealth tools, including e-consults, have enabled pediatric primary care



practices to maintain financial viability during the pandemic and support achievement of the quadruple aim.

The authors conclude by offering a call to action for their colleagues to make a compelling case for telehealth's role in primary care: "As a profession, we must take advantage of this defining moment."

## **Policy**

### **CMS Proposed Physician Fee Schedule for 2021 Continues E-Consult and Expands Telehealth Coverage**

CMS published its [proposed physician fee schedule for 2021](#) on August 4th which includes continued coverage of e-consults as interprofessional internet consultations (CPT codes 99446-9 and 99451-2). CMS also plans to permanently expand the list of telehealth services added to the physician fee schedule with additional codes that have been added during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Individuals and organizations interested in submitting comments to CMS on the proposed physician fee schedule can do so by October 5, 2020.

## **Events**

### **August 20th E-Consult Workgroup Webinar: Impact of COVID-19 on E-Consult Use**

Please join us for the next E-Consult Workgroup webinar on August 20th from 12 to 1 p.m. PT. This month's webinar will feature presentations on COVID-19's impact on e-consult utilization. Speakers include Stanley Dea, MD of LA County Department of Health Services; Danielle Oryn, MD, CEO of Redwood Community Health Coalition; Jason Cunningham, MD, CEO of West County Health Centers; and Stanley K Frencher, Jr. MD MPH, CEO of HubMD.

- Online access: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9689264532#>
- Dial-in access: +16699006833,,9689264532#

### **Save The Date: Annual E-Consult Workshop, November 16th**

The 6th annual E-Consult Workshop will take place virtually on November 16th. We are pleased to announce our keynote speaker: J. Nwando Olayiwola, MD, Chair and Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine at The Ohio State University. Registration will open in the coming weeks when we will share the full agenda for the event.

To sponsor, contact us at [electronic\\_consult@bluepathhealth.com](mailto:electronic_consult@bluepathhealth.com).

*J. Nwando Olayiwola, MD*



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