

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

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Abstract Title: The utilisation of electronic consultations within remote general practice.

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Background: One aspect of electronic health (e-health) is e-consultations (e-consults), which are consultations occurring within a shared electronic health record (EHR) or web-based platform. E-consulting can reduce the administrative workload for GPs (result notifications, repeat scripts) and improve efficiency. However, literature on the use of e-consults in routine primary care medicine specifically within the remote setting is limited.

Approach: OzDocsOnline is a web-based program with services including: repeat prescriptions, test result follow-ups, referrals and health advice. The Gorge Health General Practice in Katherine, Northern Territory has used the service since July 2012. A retrospective descriptive audit of the Gorge Health General Practice was conducted from July 2012 - April 2017. Information obtained included age, gender, frequency of use and type of use.

Outcomes / Results: Over the study period, 1404 patients have signed up for the service (29.5% male, 50.1% female, 20.4% no sex identified). A significant proportion of patients using the service were greater than 60 years old (22.1%) or between 50-59 (21.7%). The most common use was script renewal (66.7%), followed by health advice (16.9%), referrals (14.7%) and test results (8.7%). Frequency of use was once (63.7%), twice or more (19.9%) and registration without use (16.5%). In addition, 1245 patients received at least one appointment reminder (88.7%).

Take Home Message: E-consults can be used in remote general practice and have potential to improve access to healthcare for rural and remote patients. A variety of e-consultation uses exist in primary care, mainly for administrative functions rather than health advice. A large proportion of patients using the service were over 50 years old, showing that technology is not a barrier for e-health access in ageing populations.