Utility of an Electronic Consultation Program in a Children's Health System

Dinesh Pashankar
Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut

Daniel Prior
Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut

Abstract

Objectives: Electronic consultations (e-consults) are asynchronous communication between Primary Care Providers (PCPs) and specialists. Studies in adults show that e-consults improve specialty access, but the data in pediatrics are limited. We report evaluation and utility of a large pediatric e-consult program.

Methods: We reviewed our e-consults database for numbers, indications, and completion time. PCPs and specialists were surveyed to assess time spent on e-consults, and satisfaction with the e-consult program. We determined the utility of e-consults by assessing healthcare utilization for the same clinical problem within 2 months following completed e-consults.

Results: Thirty-four specialists from 13 specialties completed 2192 e-consults requested by 45 PCPs over 55 months. An average response time for e-consult completion was 0.8 days. Dermatology (42%), Endocrinology (16.6%) and Neurology (8.2%) were top 3 specialties with rashes, puberty questions and seizures as common indications respectively. Time spent on the e-consult was less than 20 minutes for PCPs (80%) and specialists (77%). High satisfaction was reported in PCPs (97%) and specialists (85%) with the e-consult program. Only 15% of patients returned to the clinics or the emergency room with the same clinical problems addressed in the e-consults within 2 months.

Conclusions: In the largest study on pediatric e-consults so far, prompt specialty advice was provided with e-consults to the PCPs by specialists. In most cases, patients did not present to our health system for the same clinical problems within 2 months. Both PCPs and specialists reported high satisfaction with the e-consult program.