**How can health care providers effectively schedule patients for office and virtual appointments in a chronic care setting?**

Virtual appointments, consisting of e-mail, phone, and online consultations, can offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional office appointments for managing chronic conditions. According to the Patient Care Access News, these appointments can allow providers to see more patients and increase patients’ access to care. Hence, health care providers increasingly rely on virtual appointments as a new way to provide effective and consistent long term care. In “Managing Virtual Appointments in Chronic Care”, Dr. Armagan Bayram of University of Michigan Dearborn, Dr. Sarang Deo of Indian School of Business, Dr. Seyed Iravani of Northwestern University, and Dr. Karen Smilowitz of Northwestern University explore models to optimally schedule patients for office and virtual appointments to maximize aggregate health benefits across a cohort of patients. The work was motivated to address the benefits of virtual appointments in chronic care.

In the paper, the authors develop a dynamic programming approach to determine which patients to schedule for office and virtual appointments that maximizes the overall patients’ health status. This approach considers clinical aspects of the problem setting as well by incorporating the disease progression and the differences in the treatment effectiveness of office and virtual appointments.

The research provides easy-to-implement patient scheduling policy rules that can assist health care providers to schedule patients for interventions that have different levels of treatment effectiveness. They show simple policies that prioritize appointment scheduling by health status perform well in most of the settings. The results further show that virtual appointments serve a dual purpose: substituting for office appointments, which opens office appointment slots for other patients in need, and providing updates on patients' health status, which can trigger a follow-up office appointment when necessary.

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