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Examining differences in characteristics between patients receiving primary care from nurse practitioners or physicians using Medicare: Current beneficiary survey data and Medicare claims data

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Background: Few studies have examined differences in functional, cognitive, and psychological factors between patients utilizing only nurse practitioners (NPs) and those utilizing only primary care physicians (PCPs) for primary care.

Purpose: Patients utilizing NP-only or PCP-only models for primary care will be characterized and compared in terms of functional, cognitive, and psychological factors.

Methodology: Cohorts were obtained from the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey linked to Medicare claims data. Weighted analysis was conducted to compare the patients within the two care models in terms of functional, cognitive, and psychological factors.

Results: From 2007 to 2013, there was a 170% increase in patients utilizing only NP's for primary care. In terms of health status, patients utilizing only NPs in their primary care were not statistically different from patients utilizing only MDs.

Conclusion: There is a perception that NPs, as compared with PCPs, tend to provide care to healthier patients. Our results are contrary to this perception. In terms of health status, NP-only patients are like PCP-only patients.

Implications for practice: Results of this study may inform research comparing NP-only care and PCP-only care using Medicare and the utilization of NPs in primary care.

Notes: