



Social Deprivation and Its Relationship with Primary Care Referrals to Secondary Care in Colorectal Patients: An Observational Study

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Abstract

Objectives: To determine the relationship between referral from primary to secondary care in colorectal patients based on social deprivation category and to examine the effect of Faecal Immunochemical Tests (FIT) on GP referrals.

Design: Observational study using data from colorectal clinic referrals examining social deprivation category and rate of referral over a two year period between 2012 and 2014.

The relationship between patient age and referral rates and the use of the FIT by GPs and rates of referral across all socioeconomic categories and ages was also examined.

Participants: 8,402 patients referred from primary care to colorectal clinic were included in the initial study between 2012 and 2014 and 3250 patients were included in the post FIT analysis between January 2016 and September 2016.

Results: Referral rates for those in the most affluent social category were higher compared to those in the most socially deprived areas. Regardless of social deprivation category older patients were more likely to be referred to secondary care.

Following introduction of FIT, GP referral numbers to secondary care were increased amongst all patient ages and social deprivation categories.

Conclusions: Inequalities were demonstrated in rates of referral from primary care to colorectal clinic between those patients from the most affluent and most deprived areas.

After introduction of FIT, rates of referral from primary to secondary care were increased amongst all ages and social deprivation categories.

Introduction

The primary aim of the UK National Health Service is to provide universal healthcare to all patients in need, irrespective of their social characteristics. Despite this, inequalities in healthcare exist. Healthcare inequality contributes to thousands of unnecessary premature deaths in Scotland each year [1]. Men from the most socially deprived areas can expect nearly 24 fewer years spent in good health [1].

Within the NHS, general practitioners play a pivotal role in controlling access to specialist care, and so factors explaining variations in referral rates have long been a focus of attention. Although socially disadvantaged, older people (>74 years), and women are more likely to consult their general practitioner [2]. The more socially advantaged, men, and younger people (<65 years) are more likely to be referred to secondary care [2].

The effectiveness of reforms such as the NHS cancer plan and national service frameworks in reducing inequalities in health partly depends on the ability of all patients to access high quality specialist care without delay [3].

It is unclear whether inequalities occur once patients are within the secondary sector or at the point of entry to specialist care.

The aim of this study was to understand the extent to which factors related to the patient, general practitioner, and general practitioner's practice explain the wide variations in referral rates (ranging

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The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care

Ian R. McWhinney



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Table of Contents The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care

1. Understanding the eBook The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - The Rise of Digital Reading The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care

- Personalized Recommendations
- The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care User Reviews and Ratings
- The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care Free and Paid eBooks
 - The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care Public Domain eBooks
 - The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care eBook Subscription Services
 - The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care Compatibility with Devices
 - The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Interactive Elements The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
- 8. Staying Engaged with The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Setting Reading Goals The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care

- Fact-Checking eBook Content of The European Study Of Referrals From Primary To Secondary Care
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
- Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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