

The Effect of the first Coronavirus lockdown on psychiatric outpatient attendance, a North Fife survey.

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Introduction and background

There has been a significant change in the way we see patients during psychiatric consultations, this has led to challenges we face in delivering safe and effective care to patients under our care. "Telepsychiatry" has been used in literature from countries like Australia and India, there is very little around coming from the UK but there appears to be many ongoing research making the rounds. It is interesting to know that the existing literature on remote/virtual consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic are on the rise but quite sparse.

The idea of this study was conceived during outpatient clinics after seeing that many patients were likely to miss their appointments when they had telephone appointments compared to video consultations. We decided to carry out a study by collecting data and statistics to know if this approach is more likely to be observed by other outpatient clinics.

The purpose of this study was to establish if virtual/remote consulting has affected patient attendance rate and whether this is also affected by the type of virtual consultation.

Method

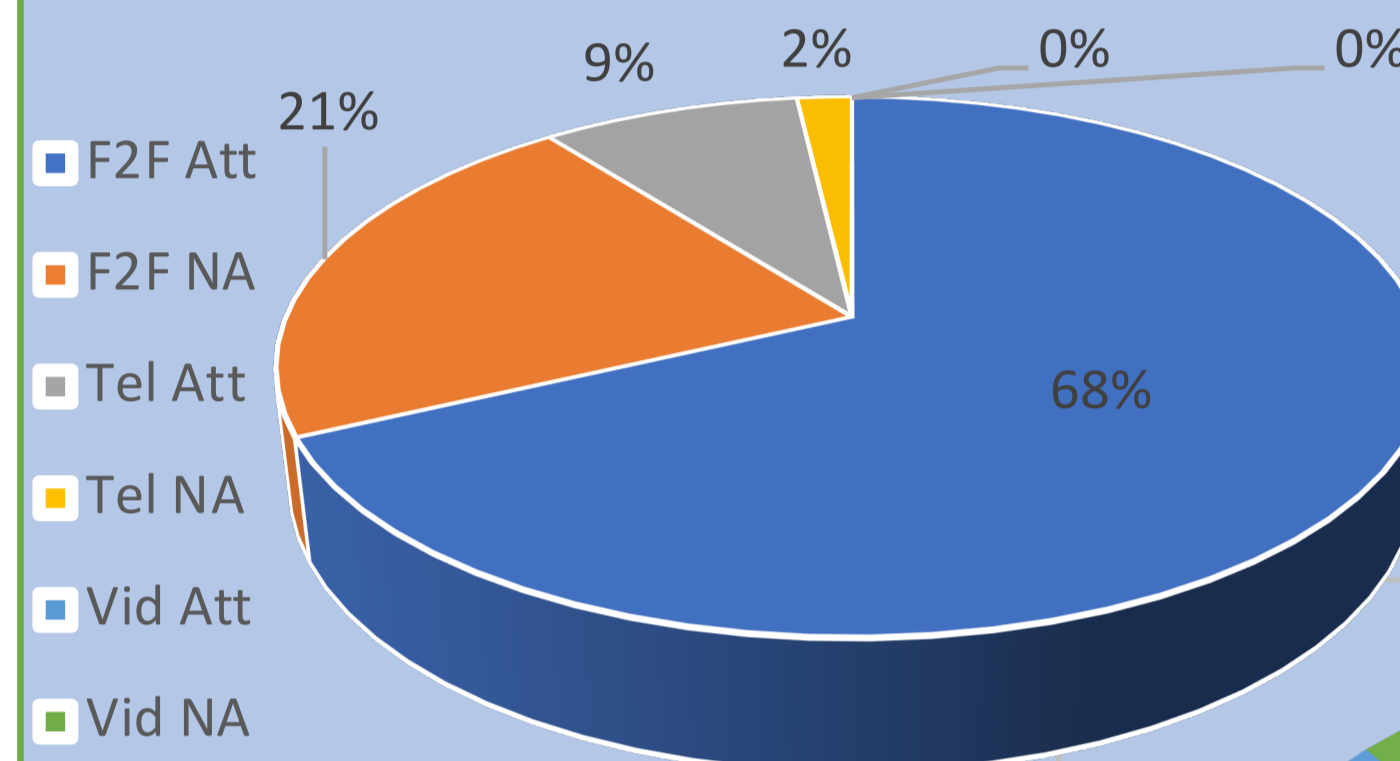
The data was collected using the "2020 stats sheets" for inpatient appointments between North Fife consultants from January to October 2020. This project was registered with the NHS Fife clinical effectiveness team in January 2021.

Results

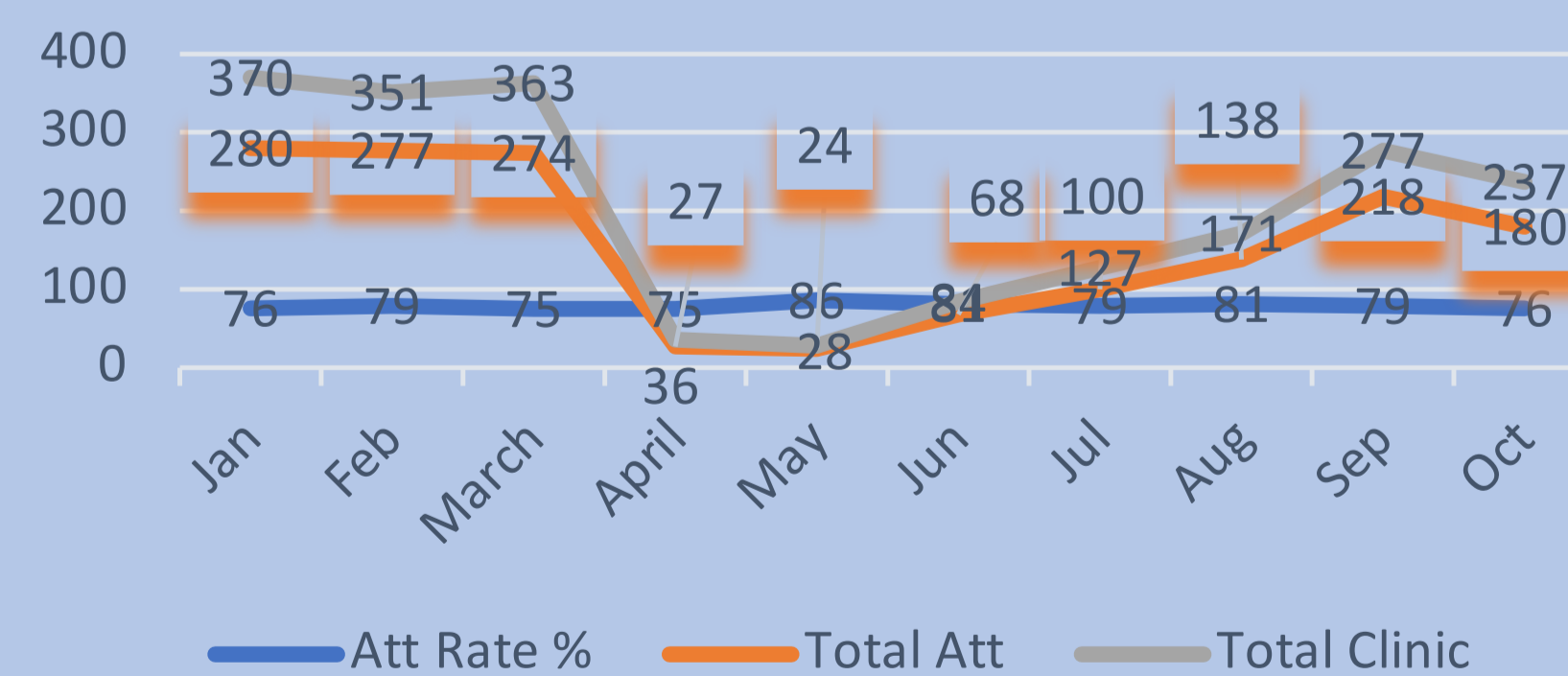
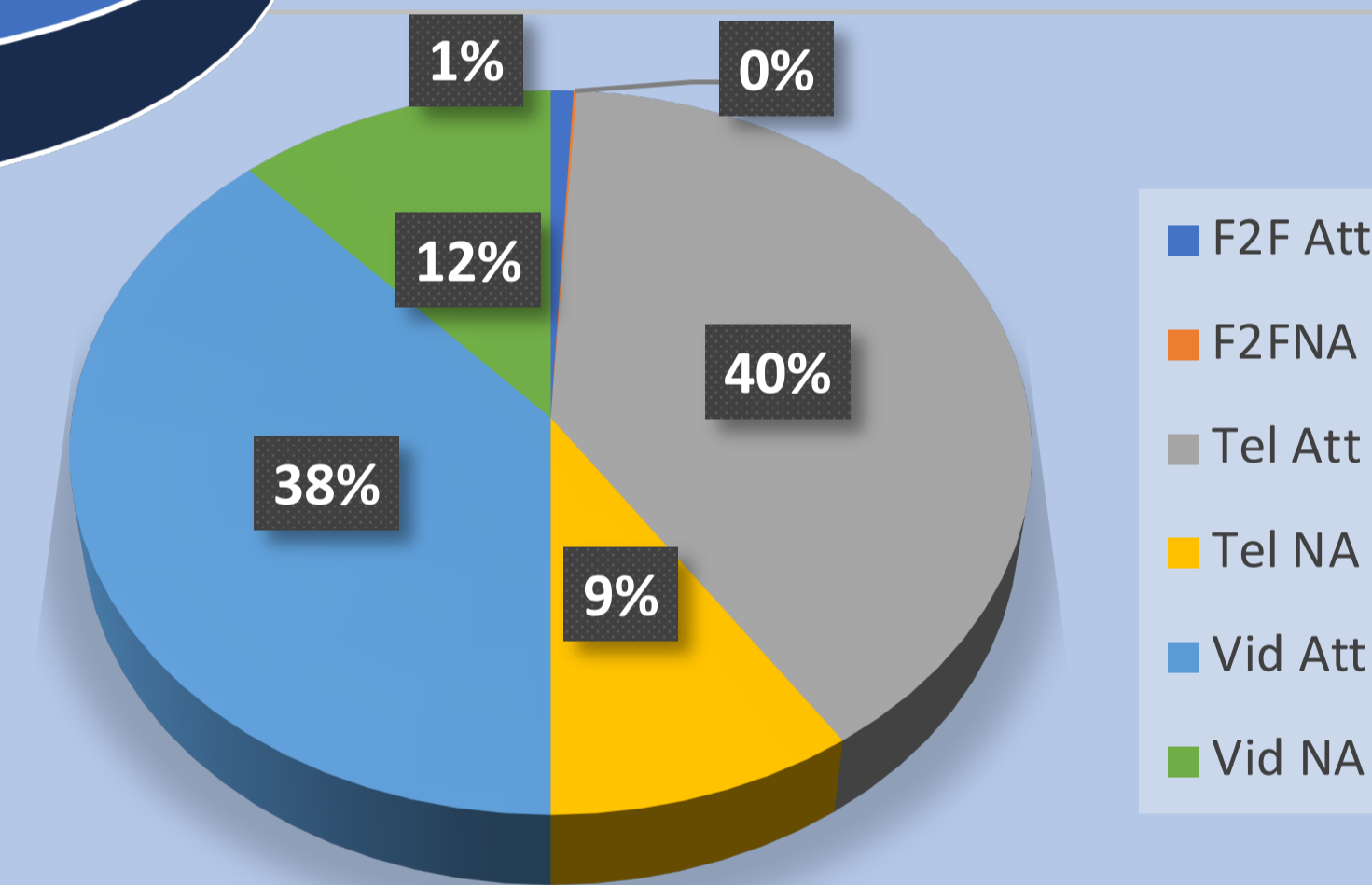
It was interesting to find that there were no virtual consultations done between January and February, there were only 8 face-to-face appointments between April and October. It is important to note that some face-to-face appointments occurred during lockdown because there were emergency assessments and drug monitoring initial appointments scheduled. The results were categorized for the purpose of this survey as January – March (Pre-lockdown) and April – October (lockdown).

The results of this survey showed that there was a clear reduction in clinic appointments made during lockdown compared to pre-lockdown and slight observable improvement in attendance rates during the lockdown. There was no statistical significance seen using t-test comparing attendance rates between video and telephone consultations including new patient virtual consultations.

Pre-lockdown attendance trend



Lockdown attendance trend



Trend of attendance rate, total number of attended and clinic appointments between Jan to Oct 2020

Discussion

The large sample size over a long period of time suggests that the results are reliable and valid, we can therefore say virtual/telephone consultation does not affect attendance. It should be noted that the attendance rate may be a good indicator, but we should also consider patient and clinician satisfaction, communication quality/effectiveness and other factors which could influence patient's compliance to outpatient follow up.

Although this was not possible in the scope of the survey, a control group for clinics as usual would have allowed the elimination of confounding factors that may have also affected the pre-lockdown and during lockdown attendance – such as the impact of the pandemic itself on attendance rates.

Mental health services should continue the use of virtual consultation post-pandemic and possibly integrate it with in person consultations (hybrid format), this may help with attendance rate of patients with difficulty attending face-to-face appointments.

References

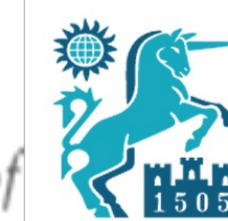
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