

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdown on referrals to the Mental Health Liaison Services at Croydon University Hospital.

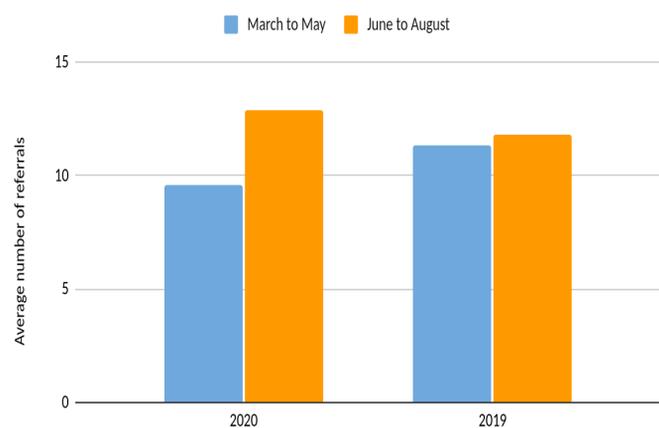
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AIM AND BACKGROUND

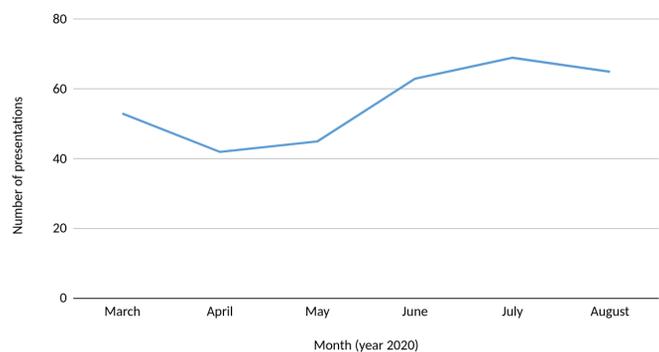
We hypothesise that the number of mental illness presentations to liaison psychiatric services decreased during the initial period of lockdown 2020 in comparison to 2019 figures. As the pandemic slowed and lockdown lifted, we predict there was an increase in presentations, above that of the previous year.

Due to fear of catching COVID-19, there was an initial avoidance from the public seeking prompt medical attention. We want to know if this pattern was reflected in patients seeking emergency mental health services.

Lockdown Vs Post lockdown



Patients presenting with Depression



RESULTS

In total, 2099 patients presented between March and August 2020 in comparison to 2139 patients over the same period in 2019. In the “lockdown” period of 2020 there were on average 9.6 (CI 8.8,1 0.3) presentations to liaison services per day compared to 12.9 (CI 12.2, 13.6) ($p < 0.005$).

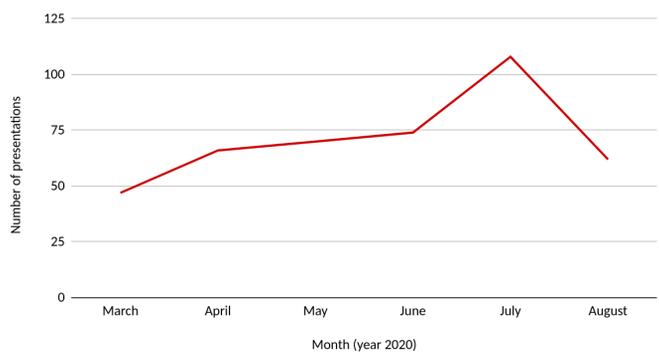
140 patients presented with depression during the lockdown period compared with 197 presentations in the 3 months following, a 40 % increase. Psychosis presentations showed a percentage change of 27 % in the 3 months following lockdown compared to the 3-month lockdown period, whilst drugs and alcohol presentations increased by 61% in the post-lockdown period.

METHODS

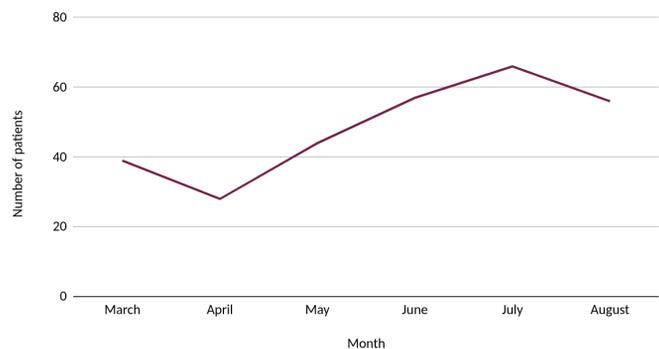
We compiled all referrals made to Working-Age Adult Liaison Psychiatry Service at Croydon University Hospital from March to August for both 2019 and 2020. We included all referrals made in A&E and the medico-surgical wards. The data was split to form a “lockdown” dataset which included referrals from March to May 2020 and a “post-lockdown” dataset including referrals from June to August 2020. We averaged the number of referrals made within a 24-hour period for the two groups and compared the averages. We used the same method for the 2019 data to assess for seasonal variation.

In terms of coding the presentation we used the diagnosis of mental illness documented in the clerking clinician's impression.

Presentations due to Psychosis (including schizophrenia and bipolar)



Presentations due to Drugs and Alcohol



CONCLUSION

This data shows that lockdown had a significant effect on the number of patients accessing mental health services during the pandemic, confirming our hypothesis that there was a reduction in presentations to emergency mental health services during the lockdown which then significantly increased when lockdown lifted. Whilst the exact mechanisms that drive mental health presentations during an unprecedented pandemic are not clear, they could prove beneficial when trying to predict service requirements in future global disasters, and therefore warrant further investigation.