

Psychiatry amidst a Pandemic: A Year in the Life of a Child & Adolescent Liaison Psychiatry Service

Ayesha Ahmed, UCL Msc in Clinical Mental Health Sciences, University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
 Olivia McGowan, UCL Msc in Clinical Mental Health Sciences, University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
 Dr. Jacob Ellis, Consultant Child and Adolescent Liaison Psychiatrist, University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Background

The University College London Hospital (UCLH) Child and Adolescent psychiatric liaison service is a specialist service providing psychiatric care to medical patients under the age of 18. Situated in central London, UCLH manages a wide variety of complex paediatric presentations through its Emergency Department (ED), wards and clinics.

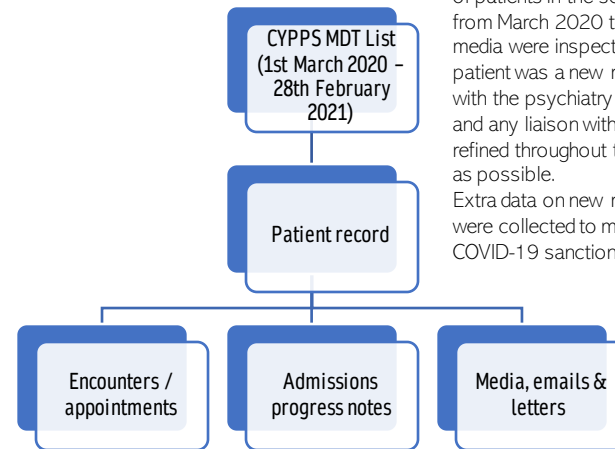
The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to the provision of healthcare. To centralise admissions and reduce the spread of the virus, the ED was closed which forced a drastic change in the way the service operated.

Aims and Hypothesis

This audit project aimed to illustrate, capture and characterise the breadth and scope of work carried out in the UCLH Child and Adolescent Liaison Psychiatry service over the year of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 – March 2021). The aim was to understand the impact of the pandemic on the type and quantity of the work carried out.

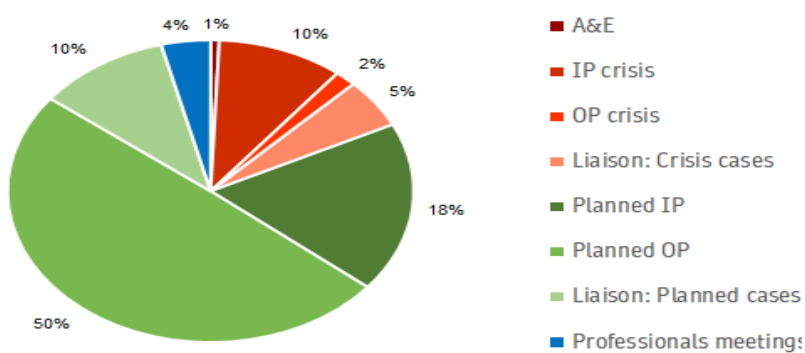
Methods

Using the service's list of patients from the weekly Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meeting as a starting point, the records of patients in the service during the sample period were accessed from March 2020 to Feb 2021. Encounters, progress notes and media were inspected to extract the following data: whether the patient was a new referral, an inpatient or outpatient, all contacts with the psychiatry team, the IRAC aim for each contact, and any liaison with other teams. The search strategy was refined throughout to ensure data extraction was as thorough as possible. Extra data on new referrals from March 2021 – July 2021 were collected to make comparisons on how the easing of COVID-19 sanctions affected the service.



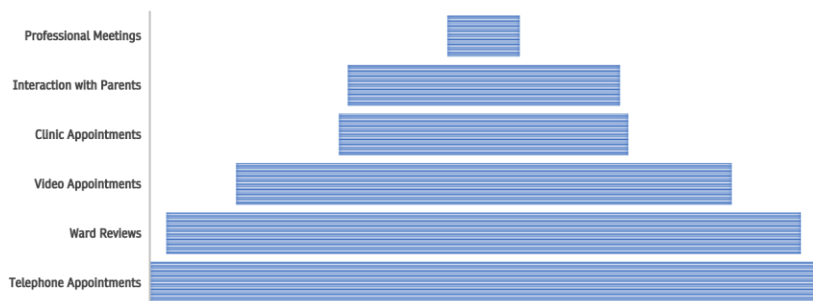
Results

Proportion of patient contacts with the service, by type



There has been a drastic decrease in the number of new referrals with the close of the ED- especially in the number of unplanned crisis cases. Since the reopening of the ED in April 2021, we can see an increase that is beginning to resemble pre-COVID in the timeline below. Most of the psychiatric work conducted from March 2020- Feb 2021 was for planned outpatients which can be accounted for the closure of the ED, but 13% of the work during this time period was still for emergency unplanned cases. There is a period from April to June 2020 where there was no new referrals as the team had moved to GOSH as part of the efforts to contain COVID-19 cases. However, the team still saw 39 inpatient crisis patients over the span of this period.

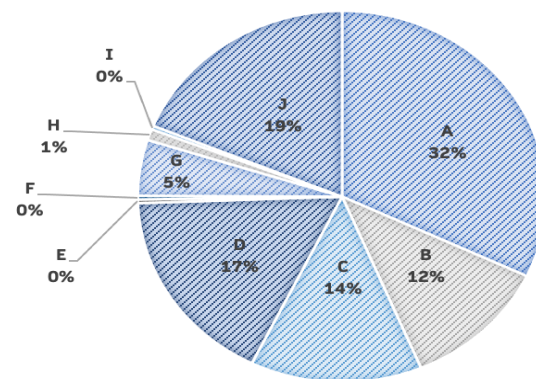
SUMMARY OF ENCOUNTER BY TYPE



There has been a greater number of telephone appointments conducted over the last year which has remained the favourite even when face-to-face appointments have resumed. However, the requirement for face-to-face contact has still remained high for young people with planned admissions into the service.

AVERAGE IRAC AIMS ACHIEVED ACCORDING TO THE MDT

- A - Assessment, Diagnosis and Formulation
- B - Providing guidance and advice
- C - Signposting and Referring on
- D - Assessment and Management of Risk
- E - Assessment of Mental Capacity
- F - Assessment re Mental Health Act
- G - Medication Management
- H - Management of Disturbed Behaviour
- I - Brief Psychological Interventions
- J - Treatment (other)



With the redistribution of the provision of the service and increase in the number of planned cases, the breadth of the IRAC aims decreased. As patients were accessing psychiatric services as part of ongoing care offered by UCLH, this could explain why certain IRACs were not achieved (E, F). With the re-opening of the ED, it would be expected there would be an increase in the achievement of these IRAC aims.

Conclusions

This effect of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant difference in the psychiatric liaison service offered by UCLH. The close of the ED led to a greater number of referrals as part of on-going healthcare offered by UCLH. The subsequent re-opening of the ED has seen a stark rise in the number of crisis cases which is reflective of the patterns of admission seen in March 2020. A future audit should consider analysing the presentation of crisis cases, especially with reflections on how delays caused by the lockdowns is changing referral times and subsequent follow-ups.

Monthly number of new referrals from March 2020- July 2021

