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eHealth profile and care coordination of primary care physicians

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Background: Digital health or eHealth is a vast field encompassing mobile health (mHealth), health information technology, wearable devices, telehealth, and telemedicine, and is changing the practice of medicine. While it holds promise for enhancing care coordination, its adoption is hindered by various barriers, including at the health-care professional level. We assessed the eHealth profile of primary care physicians and its relationship with care coordination.

Methods: As part of the Commonwealth Fund 2022 IHP survey of primary care physicians, 1114 physicians in Switzerland completed a questionnaire on their digital health use, and care coordination practices. Based on their responses, we built a digital health score, summarizing physicians' use of digital health tools, and a care coordination score. Associations between both scores were assessed using stratified analyses and multiple linear regression.

Results: Among 1114 participants (46% women, mean age 52), 83% used electronic patient records, 96% used teleconsultations for less than 5% of consultations, and 63% never used connected health tools for the monitoring of patients with chronic diseases. A total of 16% allowed for online appointments, 20% for online medical prescriptions, 52% for communicating electronically lists of medications with other healthcare professionals, and 89% the possibility of e-mail or web communications with the patient. The eHealth score was positively associated with the number of weekly working hours, being an internal medicine specialist or practicing physician, the number of full-time equivalents in the practice, and with being in a group practice setting. The higher the eHealth profile score, the higher was the care coordination score.

Conclusions: Physicians' use of digital health tools was positively associated with care coordination. This could underscore the potential benefits of digital health in enhancing collaborative and inter-professional care practices.

Key messages:

- In a large survey of primary care physicians, the use of digital health tools and care coordination were correlated.
- Digital health could enhance collaborative and interprofessional care practices.