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Covid-19-related alterations in racial disparities in dermatology practice patterns



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Introduction: Racial disparities have been found in dermatology access and physician time. Studies have shown that Covid-19 exacerbated racial disparities in healthcare. We explored the influence of Covid-19 on the association between race/ethnicity and visit duration in Dermatology. **Methods:** This single site retrospective study compared practice patterns in Dermatology using the EHR audit trail for 38,577 outpatient visits from January 2020-December 2021. Visit duration and visit complexity were compared between non-Hispanic (NH) white and non-white patients across 4 phases of COVID-19 restrictions: Pre-Covid, red (lockdown), orange (schools closed/masking), yellow (masking). Analyses (ANOVA; Tukey-Kramer) were performed at 0.05 significance level using R and JMP. **Results:** Visit duration did not differ between NH whites and non-whites during pre-Covid and lockdown; however, duration differences between the two groups became prominent in orange and yellow phases ($\Delta=196$ and $\Delta=349$, $p<0.01$). For both groups, orange phase had the shortest visit duration. Surprisingly, non-whites had longer visit durations post-Covid (i.e., orange; yellow) compared to NH whites. Covid reduced visit complexity in both groups ($p<0.01$). Overall, non-whites were younger than NH whites across all phases (38 vs 53, $p<0.01$), suggesting the longer visit durations in non-whites. Diagnoses and level of service may also influence visit duration. **Conclusions:** Our findings reflect differences in practice patterns in Dermatology visits between NH white and non-white patients. Covid-19 impacted visit duration and complexity, with longer visit duration, greater visit complexity and younger age observed in non-white patients. Further understanding of practice pattern disparities may help promote health equity. **Research Support:** NSF (HINDS-2120530) and University of Rochester CTSA (UL1 TR002001).