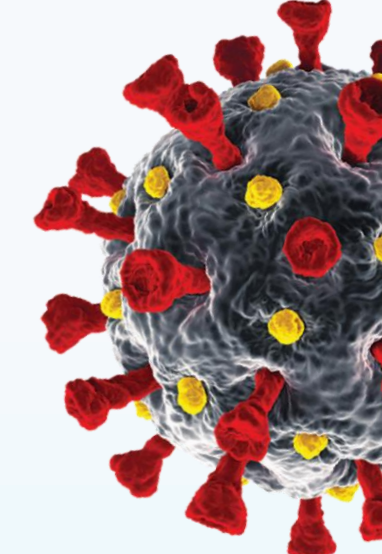


Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare services availability: cross-sectional online survey in Poland

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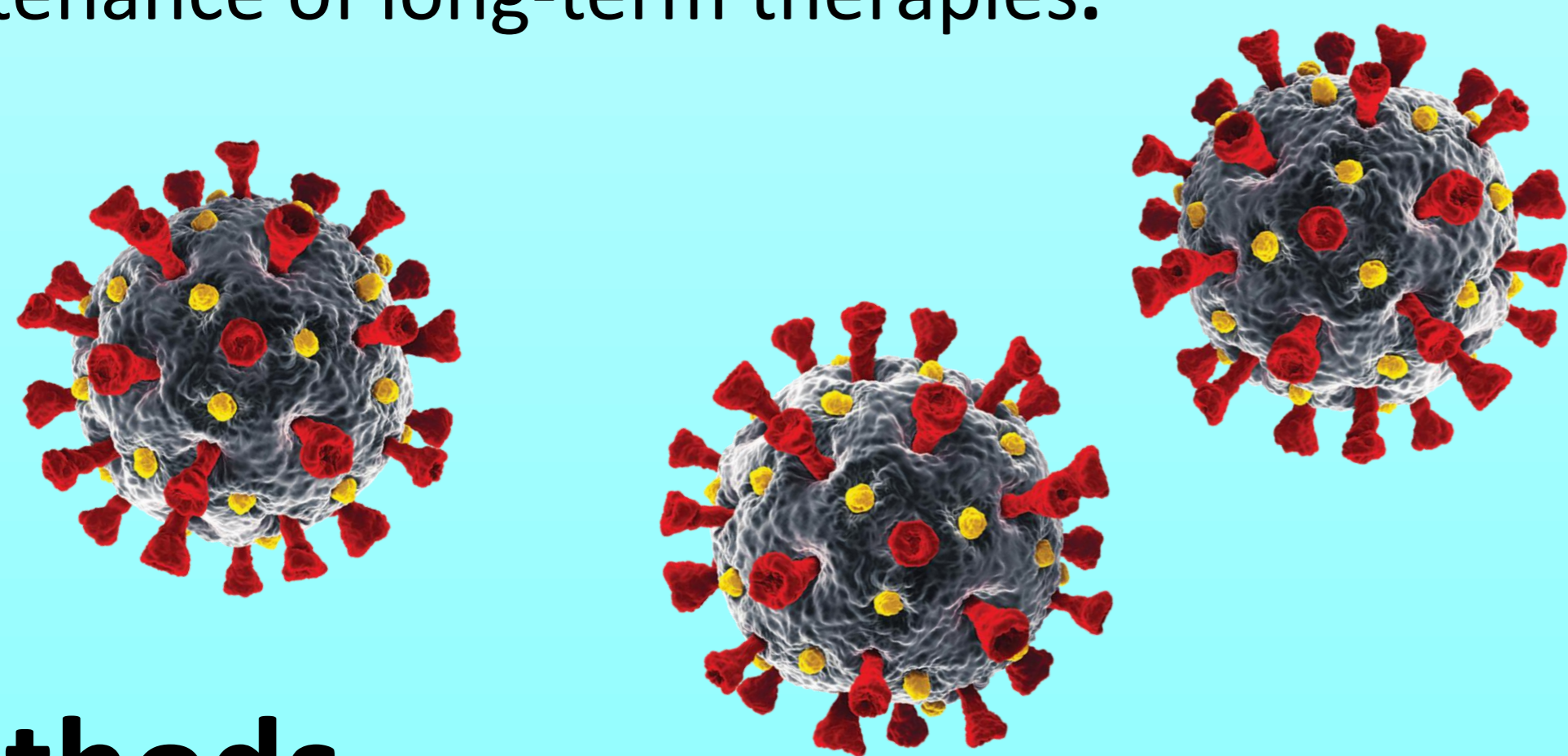


Introduction

COVID-19 disrupted provision of healthcare services in many countries. Most of the healthcare professionals' time has been devoted to the pandemic itself, and hence, the other services become much less available. This, in particular, could affect the availability of long-term care for patients suffering from non-communicable chronic conditions.

Aim

The aim of the study was to assess the effect of pandemic on provision of healthcare services in Poland, and particularly, the maintenance of long-term therapies.



Methods

A cross-sectional online survey, opened between January 13th - March 7th, 2021, i.e. during the third tide of Covid-19 pandemic. Open invitation has been distributed via various on-line channels.

Results

1,505 respondents aged 23.4 +/- 6.5 participated in the study, of which 429 (28.5%) self-identified as those equipped with chronic conditions. Respondents reported poorer access to primary care doctors (56.0%), particularly those with chronic conditions (63.6%, for details see Figure 1). They also reported poorer access to specialist doctors (42.7% and 52.5%, respectively), as well as longer waiting time for consultation (42.2%, and 49.4%). Most of them could consult their doctors via teleconsultations (Figure 2), and videoconsultations. In general, participants did not have problems with obtaining prescription needed (Figure 3), nor filling them in the community pharmacy. However, some respondents reported running out of the drugs they needed (16.2% among all respondents, and 34.5% in chronic patients). Some of them felt less well (16.2%) or much less well (11.0%) supported by the healthcare professionals during pandemic.

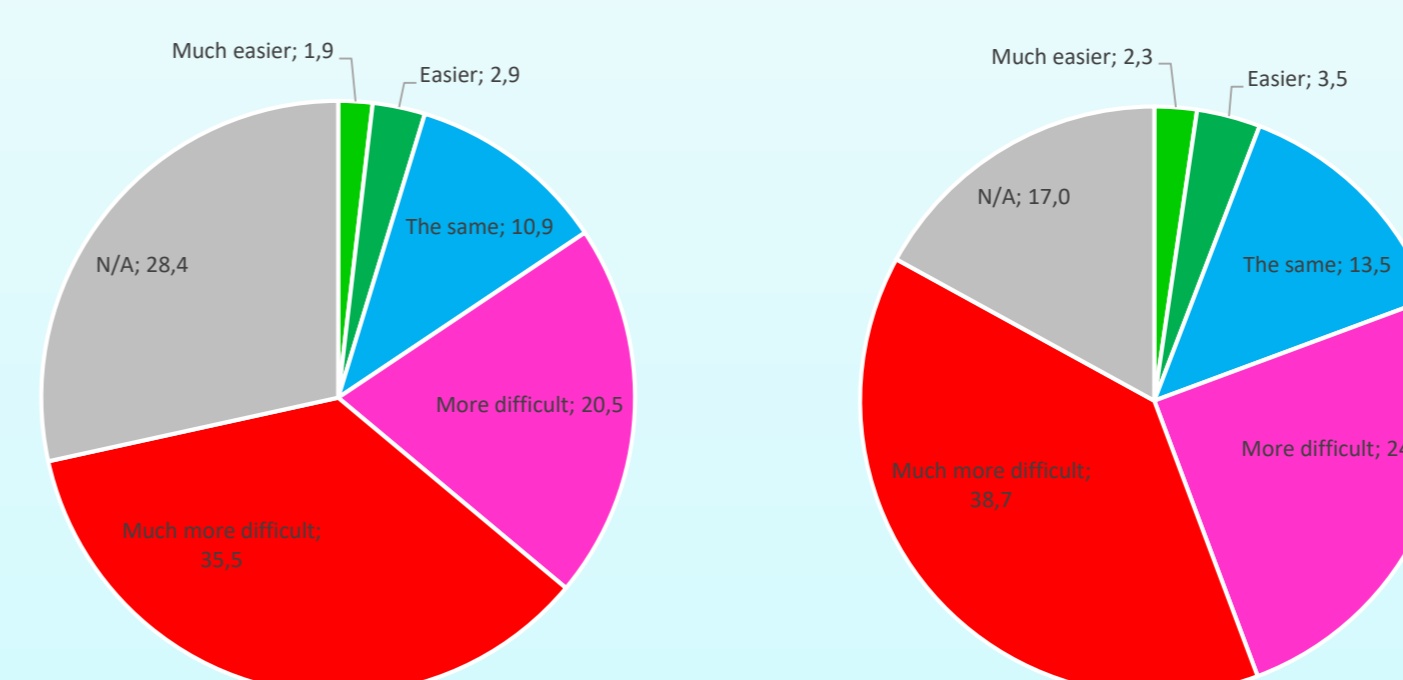
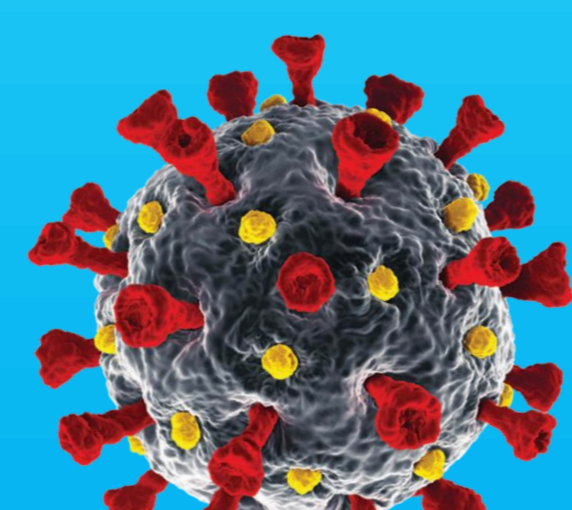


Fig. 1.

Ease of scheduling a visit to their GP, as compared to before Covid-19 (in %): all respondents (left) and chronic patients (right)

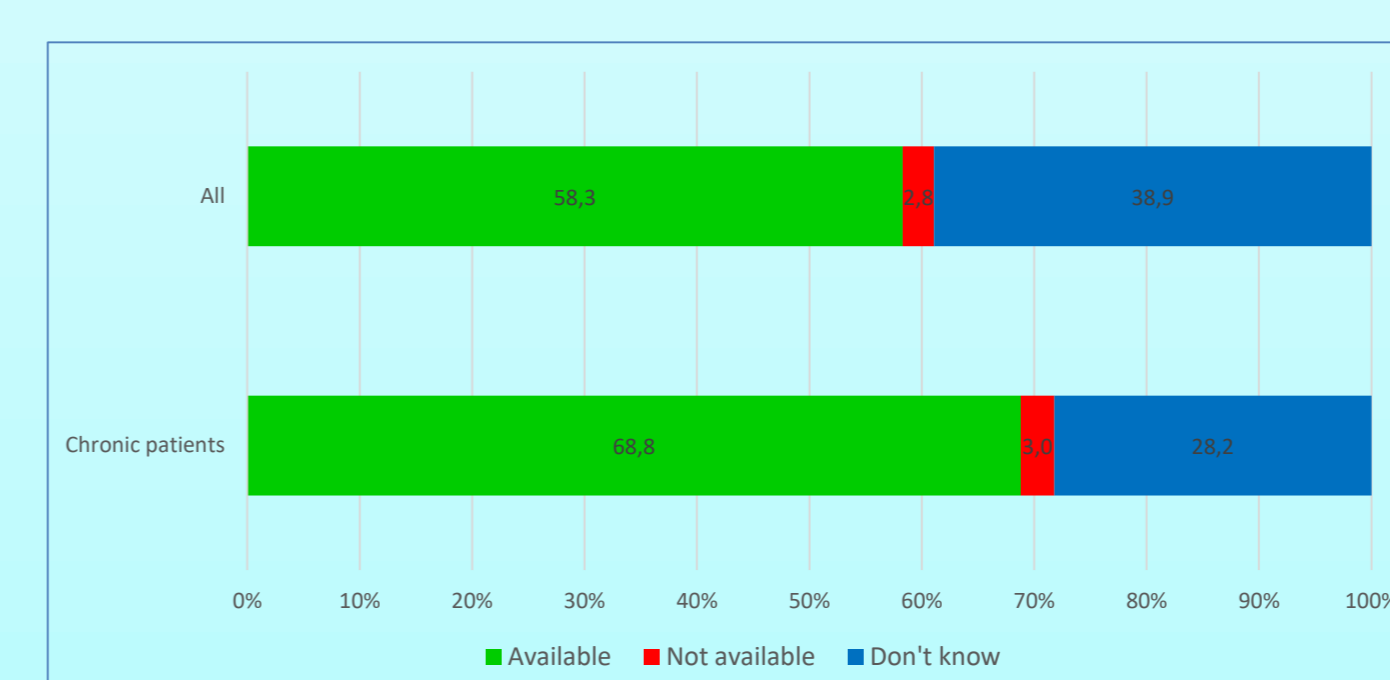


Fig. 2.

Availability of teleconsultations with their doctor (in %): all respondents (top) and chronic patients (bottom)

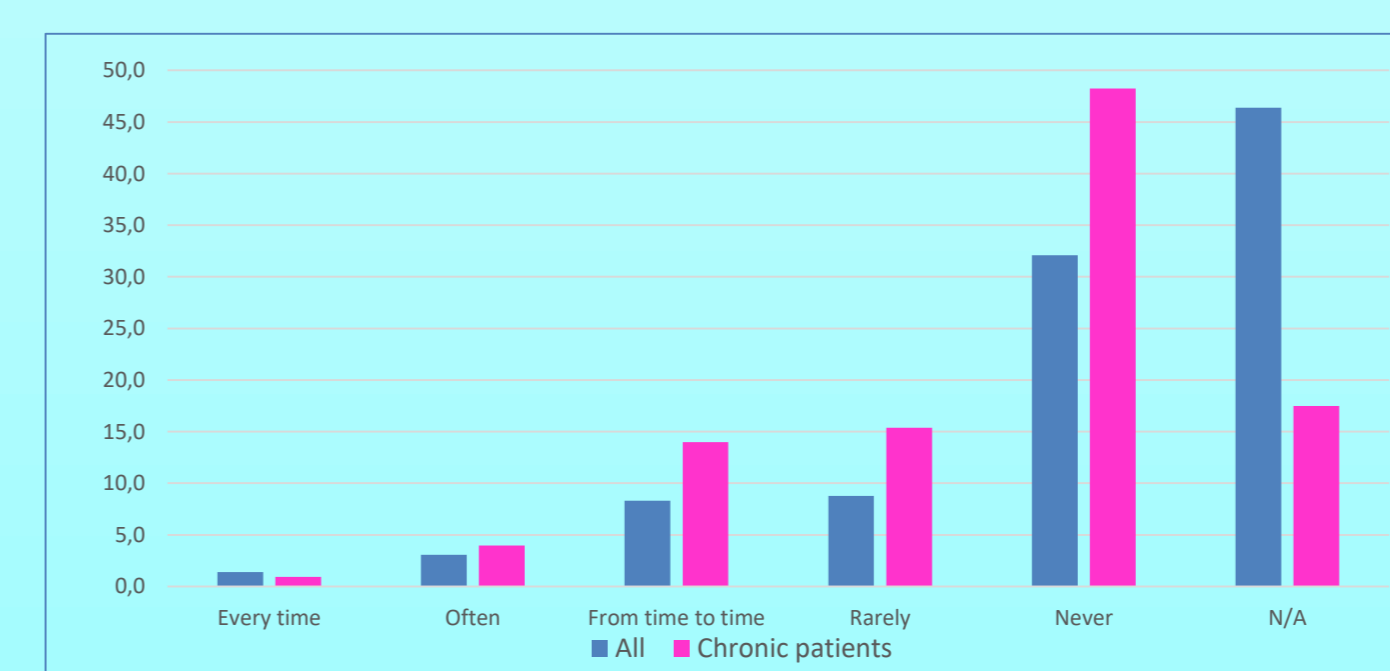


Fig. 3.

Problems with obtaining prescriptions during Covid-19 pandemic (in %)

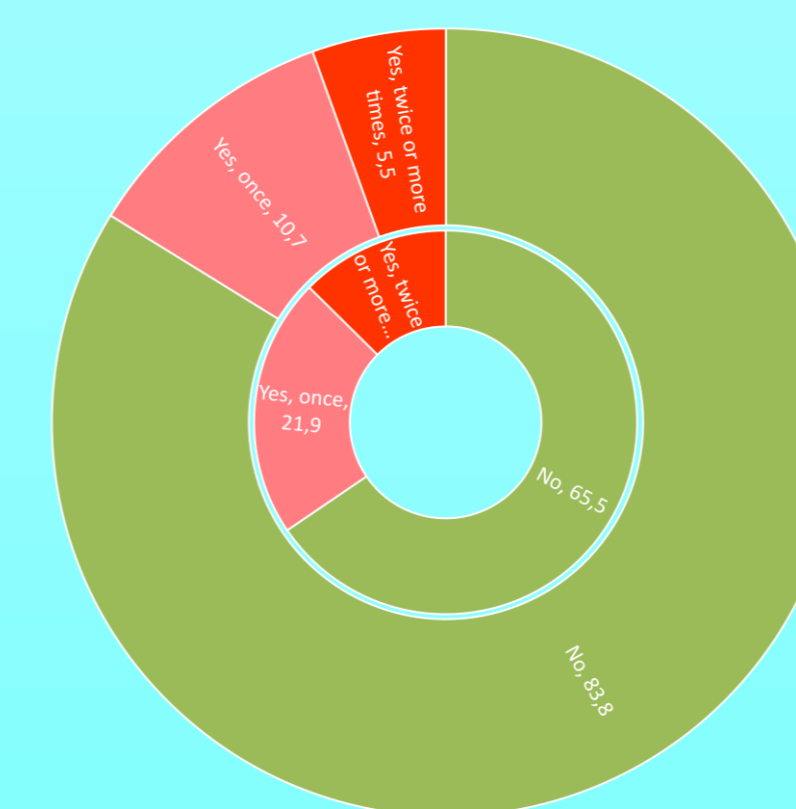


Fig. 4.

Having run out of drugs during Covid-19 pandemic (in %): all respondents (outer circle) and chronic patients (inner circle)

Discussion

On one hand, our survey illustrated the shift from onsite to various forms of teleconsultations, which undoubtedly helped to manage chronic conditions during the time of pandemic. On the other hand, our result point at important disruption of the continuity of access to healthcare services, and related discontinuation of the chronic therapies. These results need to be interpreted in a light of young age of survey participants - in the older groups the scenario could even look worse.

Conclusions

Our survey identified gaps in the coverage of Polish national healthcare system during unfavourable conditions of COVID-19 pandemic. In the light of these findings, relevant actions need to be taken in order to secure better resilience on national system of chronic conditions' management.