

Requests for home care skyrocketed during COVID-19

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Health care systems have been dramatically affected by the COVID-19

pandemic, with hospitals and aged care homes receiving the lion's share of the media's attention around the world. But now, researchers from Japan have characterized specific changes in access to home care during this period.

In a study recently published in *BMC Research Notes*, researchers from the University of Tsukuba have revealed that the proportion of individuals requesting [home care](#) changed dramatically as a consequence of the COVID-19 [pandemic](#).

Home care, in which [health care professionals](#) provide treatment at a patient's residence, is generally sought as an alternative to hospitals and outpatient facilities. Home care is very resource intensive, as [medical professionals](#) are required to travel to the patient and to bring necessary supplies. At present, little is known about how access to home care changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which the researchers at Osaka University aimed to address.

"Home care is an important element of multifaceted community health care services," says lead author of the study Professor Jun Hamano. "The changes in access to home care during the COVID-19 pandemic could reveal important information regarding the way that pandemics influence health care infrastructure."

To examine this, the researchers conducted a multicenter cross-sectional web-based anonymous survey of directors of home care facilities in Japan. The participants provided responses to a questionnaire, which was administered in August 2021.

"The results indicated that the number of home visits was much higher compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic," explains senior Professor Hamano. "Further, the number of patients who died at home increased substantially."

The results did not vary according to the number of doctors in a given area or whether the care home was in an urban or rural location.

"Our findings indicate that the restrictions on access to inpatient facilities instated during the COVID-19 pandemic led more individuals to seek treatment at home. As such, [health professionals](#) who conducted [home visits](#) were likely to have experienced an increased workload, and thus to need more support and cooperation with community health structures," says Professor Hamano.

Home care is a critical community health care service. Understanding the ways in which access to home care changes during global health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may help public health authorities to plan for future situations in terms of the structure of the home care system, support needed for home care staff, and the relationship between the home care and hospital systems.

More information: Jun Hamano et al, Changes in home visit utilization during the COVID-19 pandemic: a multicenter cross-sectional web-based survey, *BMC Research Notes* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s13104-022-06128-7](#)

Provided by University of Tsukuba

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