Virtual Consultations for Breast Cancer Surgery in Ontario: Reducing wait-times from Diagnosis to Surgical Consult

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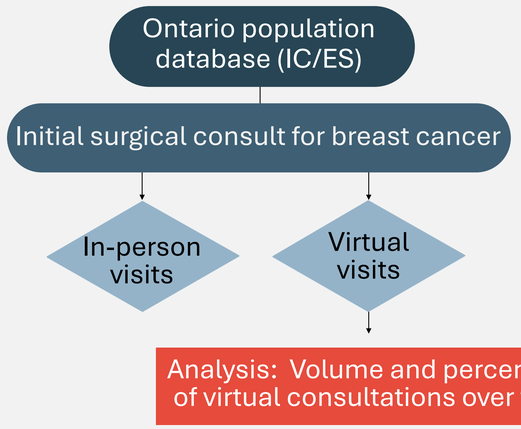
INTRODUCTION

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, surgeons leveraged virtual consultations offering potential savings in time and costs for patients needing surgical consults
- This study serves as a preliminary step towards a quality improvement initiative in surgical practices

Objective

To explore the utilization of virtual surgical consultations for new breast cancer diagnoses during the COVID-19 pandemic

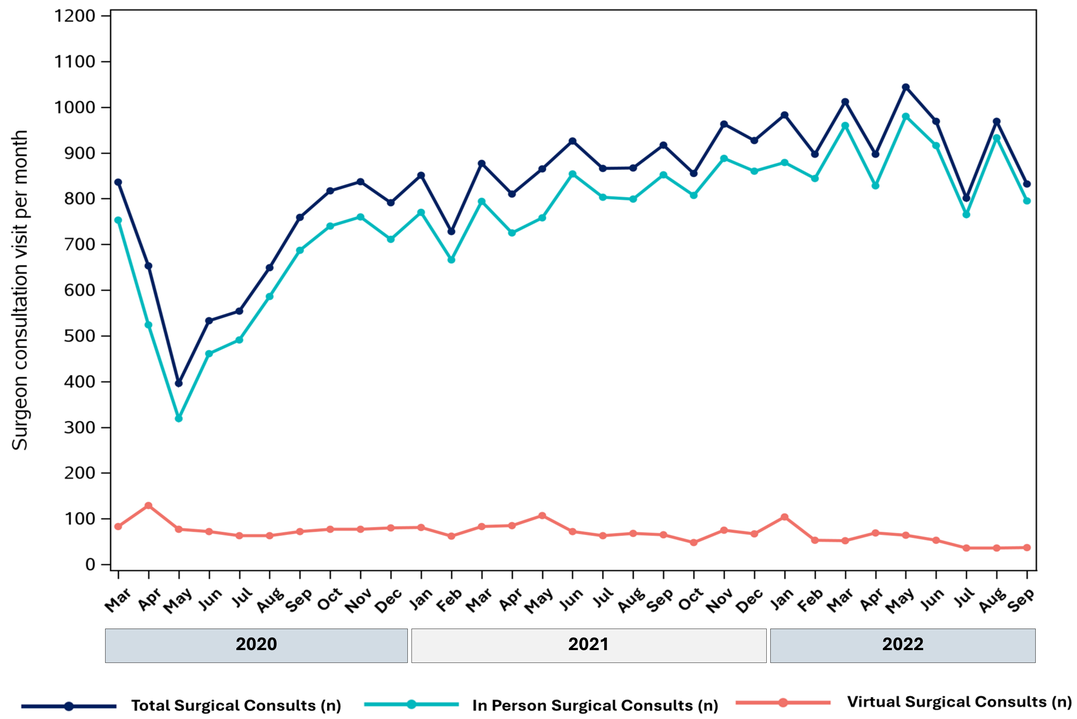
METHODS



RESULTS

- **Identified 25,411 breast cancer patients diagnosed from March 14, 2020 to September 30, 2022**
  - → Only 2,111 patients (9.1%) received virtual surgical consultations.

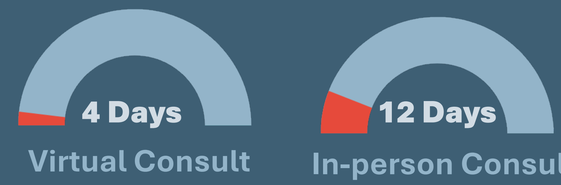
Figure 1 - Monthly surgeon consultation visits (JAN 2020 - SEP 2022) - First



- **Trends over time:** Peak virtual consultations were in April 2020 (19.8%), with a subsequent decline
- **Wait Times from diagnosis to surgical consultation:** Virtual consultation patients experienced significantly shorter wait times (mean 3.8 ± 35.7 days) compared to in-person (mean 11.9 ± 24.7 days, $p < 0.001$).

CONCLUSION

- Our data demonstrates that virtual consultation (VC) significantly reduced wait times for breast cancer patients to see a surgeon



- VC in Ontario remains underutilized post-pandemic, highlighting a need for broader health system adoption where feasible
- VCs offer a significant opportunity for future quality improvement in healthcare delivery
- Investigating long-term patient-centric outcomes of virtual versus in-person consultations is essential

FUTURE RESEARCH

Understanding barriers towards expanding Virtual Care:

- Demographic differences
- Disparities in underserved populations
- Rural vs. urban challenges
- Technology access and literacy