

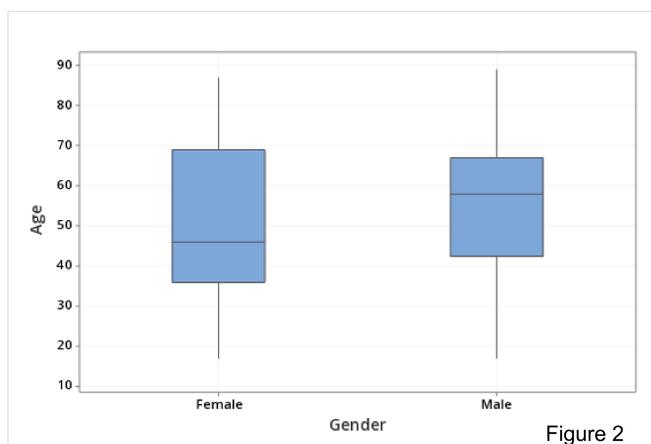
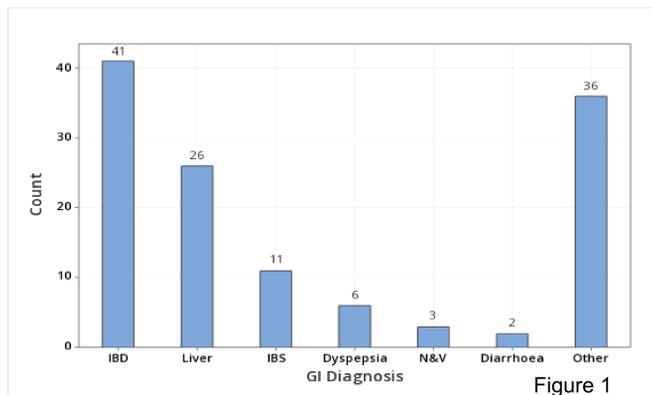
E. Shannon, C. McHale, A. Alvain, C. Goulding
Department of Gastroenterology, University Hospital Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

Introduction

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, outpatient gastroenterology clinics have switched predominantly to virtual consultations

Aim

Our aim was to determine patient preferences for the method of consultation in clinics, identify reasons and determine any relationship with patient demographics and their preference.



Methods

We performed a cross-sectional analysis study over a 3 week period at gastroenterology clinics in a model 4 hospital. A standardised questionnaire was used to record preferences. Statistical analysis was completed using Excel and MiniTab

Results

One hundred and twenty five patients participated in the study, of whom 64/125 (51.2%) were female. The mean age was 52.8 years (17 -89 years). In the current Covid-19 situation, 53.6% of patients favoured virtual clinics, 33.6% physical clinics, while the remainder has no preference (Figure 3). There was no significant difference between the ages of patients in these groups ($p = 0.211$). Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) was the only diagnosis that demonstrated significant difference (Figure 4), with 90.9% of patients preferring virtual clinic reviews ($p = 0.048$ Fisher's Exact).

The most frequently cited reason for favouring virtual clinics was convenience (78.4%), with only 15% of patients (mean age 60.3 years) citing fear of Covid-19 as their primary reason (Figure 5).

Regarding future appointments; 38.4% of patients reported a preference for virtual clinics, with 24% preferring to attend in person. 37.6% of patients would opt for a mixture of both depending on their disease activity.

Conclusion

Our study suggests that only a minority of patients would prefer to revert back fully to physical clinics. This has important implications for planning and streamlining future clinics in an era with considerable capacity and time constraints.

