

Improving Diagnostic Accuracy in Rural Medicine

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Abstract : Introduction: Although rewarding in more ways than one, rural medicine can be challenging. The factors that lead to the challenges experienced in rural medicine include but are not limited to scarcity of resources, poor patient education inadequately trained professionals. This is the first single center study done on the challenges of and ways to improve diagnosis in rural medicine. Materials and Methods: Questionnaires were given to providers in a single hospital in rural Tennessee USA. In which providers were asked the question 'In the past six months, what measures have you taken to improve your diagnostic accuracy given limited resources. Results: The questionnaire was passed to ten physicians working in a two hundred and twentyfive hospital bed. Physicians who participated included physicians in hospital medicine, emergency medicine, surgery, cardiology and gastroenterology. The study found that improved physical examination skills, access to specialist especially via telemedicine and affiliation to centers with more experienced professionals improved diagnosis and overall patient outcome in rural medicine. Conclusion: From this single center study, there is evidence to show that in addition to honing physical examination skills and having access to immediate results of testing done; hospital collaborations and access to highly trained specialist via telemedicine does improve diagnosis in rural medicine.

Keywords : rural medicine, diagnostic accuracy, diagnosis, telemedicine

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