

**Introduction:**

- Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) play a vital role in the provision of primary care in Ontario, often being the first and most accessible members of health care teams.
- The COVID-19 pandemic changed how primary care is provided and put pressure on MOA roles.
- MOAs were responsible for pivoting to new ways of providing and triaging primary care
- Most family physicians employ MOAs, yet they have been overlooked in research despite their central role in health care
- This study illuminates the role of MOAs during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Purpose:**

1. To identify and describe the changes in family practice office procedures and protocols experienced by MOAs during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of MOAs and the family practitioners with whom they work
2. To explore the impact of COVID-19 on the quality and nature of MOAs relationships with other family practice staff and patients
3. To examine how these workplace changes due to COVID-19 are being maintained or modified as family practice moves to a recovery period

**Methods:** Grounded Theory

**Recruitment:**

- MOAs and family physicians from 9 different communities in Ontario, Canada

**Inclusion Criteria:**

- MOAs and family physicians working in primary care in Ontario for at least 6 months during the pandemic (March 2020-June 2022)

# ***What Were The Experiences of the Gatekeepers to Family Physicians During the COVID-19 Pandemic?***



**Study Title:** **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Roles, Responsibilities and Health of Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) Working in Family Medicine Clinics in Ontario: Implications for Primary Care Access and Quality**

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**Data Collection:**

- semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 9 family physicians and 8 MOAs
- MOAs were asked for their experiences working in family medicine clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Family physician participants were asked for their perception of the MOAs roles
- Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim

**Data Analysis:**

- Analysis was iterative and occurred alongside data collection. Interviews continued until saturation of themes was reached.

**Findings from this Study:**

- The roles, responsibilities and workload of MOAs expanded during the pandemic
- The work of MOAs was highly appreciated by family physicians during this crisis with many realizing the pivotal role they play with patients
- In their work, MOAs most value their relationships with patients
- MOAs experienced significant stress trying to bridge the expanding gap between patients' demands and the ability of family physicians to meet them
- From the participants' perspectives, there was a strengthening of primary care team relationships with sharing of information about COVID-19 and overall flattening of hierarchy