

Case Study | Improving Senior Healthcare Quality with eConsults


Collaborative innovations like eConsults help primary care leaders navigate the “Silver Tsunami” by enabling more holistic and cost-effective care

We live in an aging nation where nearly one in four Americans will be 65 or older by 2060. The increasing senior population is even projected to outpace the number of children 18 and under by 2034. This unprecedented increase in the number of older adults, referred to as the “Silver Tsunami,” is a seismic shift that challenges healthcare leaders to build capacity with innovative strategies that deliver more accessible, effective, and patient-centered care. **This paper examines the impact of specialty eConsults as a cost-effective best practice that improves geriatric care coordination.**

A critical need to address age-related health issues

During the COVID-19 pandemic, seniors suffered a disproportionate amount of harm while in the care of the US health system. What may have contributed to the poor outcomes? Seniors are at an increased risk of developing multiple chronic conditions, requiring more complex, costly, and specialized care.

Seniors also live with greater physical vulnerability and face limitations in performing activities of daily living, which often leads to increased incidence of falls, anxiety and depression, and [potential for substance misuse](#) — all concerns that complicate medical treatments and contribute to polypharmacy. And ageism, named by the American Psychological Association as one of the last socially acceptable prejudices, can be the sneaky culprit negatively influencing clinical treatment decisions and attitudes towards the elderly.

 Older adults are hospitalized for fall-related injuries **5x** more often than for injuries from other causes¹

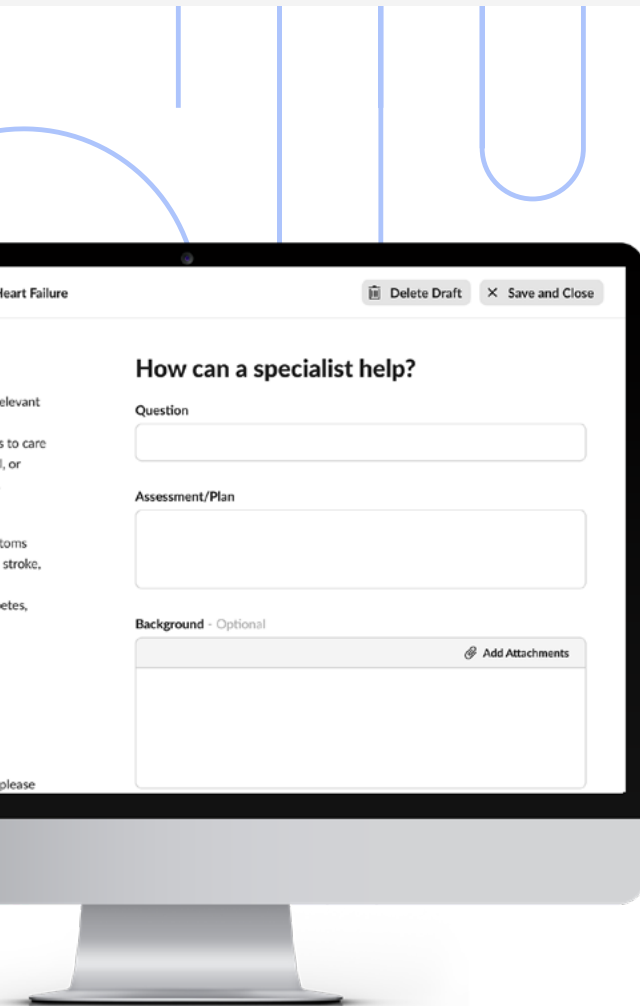


1 in 4 older adults experiences a behavioral health problem such as depression, anxiety, or substance abuse²

SPOTLIGHT | A \$1.3 billion annual problem

Polypharmacy – defined as taking at least 5 medications at once – increases the risk of high-cost adverse drug effects, including falls and cognitive impairment. Studies estimate avoidable costs associated with inappropriate polypharmacy are overwhelmingly tied to ER visits and hospitalizations.

PCPs play an important role in leading a deprescribing approach. While polypharmacy may be unavoidable for senior patients living with complex conditions, PCPs can benefit from additional specialty insights to ensure that patients' prescribed medications are medically necessary and taken properly. With collaborative support and monitoring from virtual specialists, PCPs can break the cycle of excessive polypharmacy and deliver safer, more patient-centric care.³



The eConsult solution

[eConsults](#), or electronic consultations, offer a transformative solution for addressing the healthcare needs of seniors. By enabling primary care providers to consult with specialists virtually, eConsults streamline care coordination, reduce wait times, and facilitate timely access to expert guidance. Moreover, eConsults enhance care coordination among various healthcare providers involved in a senior's treatment plan. This interdisciplinary collaboration ensures that seniors receive holistic care, and that treatment decisions are made collectively, to optimize outcomes.

Geriatric patient cases with expert educational guidance

Explore recent eConsults addressing complex patient issues covering medication management, hospitalization avoidance, and complex condition diagnosis.

Minimize the risks of polypharmacy

- 91 y.o. female
- Dementia and cirrhosis
- Kidney dysfunction
- Sundowning symptoms

[View the Case](#)

Frailty assessment & prevent adverse events

- 76 y.o. male
- Multiple chronic illnesses
- History of falls
- Mental health concerns

[View the Case](#)

Comprehensive medication reconciliation review

- 78 y.o. female
- Cardio-metabolic conditions
- Side effects of drug-to-drug interactions

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Conclusion: Close gaps in fragmented senior care through innovation

The wave of aging adults reshapes the landscape of senior healthcare and calls for innovative approaches to making care more accessible and specialized. eConsults emerge as a key strategy for addressing the complex needs of seniors, streamlining connections between primary and specialty care fields including gerontology, neurology, psychology, pharmacy, social services, and more.

eConsults allow PCPs and specialists to collaborate on common challenges such as geriatric medication management, ensuring the most appropriate and safe treatment regimens. Virtual care technology also facilitates easier access to care, allowing seniors to access more specialized medical expertise without additional referrals and mobility challenges. Integrating eConsults holistically into geriatric healthcare can significantly improve access to specialized care, enhance patient care and outcomes, which will promote better quality of life for the aging population.

References:

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2. Source: Wyatt Koma, et al. One in Four Older Adults Report Anxiety or Depression Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. Kaiser Family Foundation. Oct. 9, 2020. <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/one-in-four-older-adults-report-anxiety-or-depression-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
3. Legislative Analysis <https://legislativeanalysis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Polypharmacy-FINAL.pdf>

