

# Doctors whose psychological needs are met associated with greater well-being in the new digital era

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Canadian researchers examined how the rapid shift to using virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted primary care doctors' well-

being at work. They utilized a self-determination theory (SDT) lens to examine how autonomous (vs. controlled) motivation among family physicians impacted their well-being when shifting to virtual care, and whether satisfaction (vs. frustration) of their basic psychological needs at work mediated that relationship.

The researchers gathered qualitative data by surveying 156 [family physicians](#) in Alberta, Canada. The [questionnaire](#) contained validated scales for measuring motivational quality, workplace psychological need fulfillment, and subjective well-being. They performed descriptive, correlational, and mediation analyses. The findings have been published in *Annals of Family Medicine*.

The authors found that primary care doctors who felt that they had little choice in using virtual care had decreased well-being, and frustration of their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fully mediated that relationship. Conversely, basic psychological need satisfaction at work was associated with higher well-being. The findings suggest that when family physicians' [motivation](#) towards using virtual care is less self-determined, it will lead to poorer well-being, because of psychological need frustration.

The COVID-19 pandemic required [medical professionals](#) to adopt telehealth in order to meet the health care needs of patients while keeping them safe from the virus. Prior to this study, the effects that this shift in practice had on primary care physician well-being were largely unknown.

Doctors who have higher levels of workplace psychological need satisfaction will likely have higher well-being, regardless of their motivation towards using virtual care. Controlled motivation towards using virtual care, however, seems to predict lower well-being, because of psychological-need frustrations in the workplace. Interventions that

address these [basic psychological needs](#), and particularly the need for autonomy, may improve physician well-being.

**More information:** Family Physician Motivation and Well-Being in the Digital Era, *Annals of Family Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1370/afm.3031](#)

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