BACKGROUND

The sufficient and efficient provision of primary care services is an important goal in every healthcare system. In Switzerland, primary care is mainly provided by self-employed general practitioners (GPs). When self-employed GPs reach retirement age, existing practices are increasingly discontinued. From the perspective of patients, the closing of a practice causes a discontinuity of care and a decrease in the availability of primary care.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do closures of primary care practices affect:
- patients’ utilization patterns?
- health-related outcomes such as hospitalization rates and healthcare expenditures?

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Practice closures (i.e. discontinuity of primary care) lead to changes in patients’ utilization patterns and higher healthcare expenditures. The results suggest that practice closures may cause inefficient utilization of healthcare and higher costs for social health insurance.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The empirical strategy is based on a difference-in-difference framework to identify the causal effects of practice closures (i.e. discontinuities of care). Average outcomes before and after practice closures between affected patients (treatment group) and an unaffected group that does not experience changes in primary care provision (control group) are compared. Estimation is based on a fixed effects model.

DATA

- Identification of practice closures: monthly consultations on the provider level from 2005 to 2016 in mandatory health insurance (Datenpool, Sasis AG)
- Matched patient-provider panel data: Insurance claims data from CSS Insurance. Patients in treated group: 14,817; patients in control group 169,471.

SELECTED REFERENCES

[References list provided with inline citations and figures.

Note: Dots correspond to monthly averages and the smoothed curve is based on a local linear regression using a triangular kernel and a bandwidth of 5. The confidence interval is 90%. The data has been demeaned using individual pre-treatment means for the period [-24, -3]. Event time indicates the month relative to the event of the practices closure (at \( t = 0 \)).]