

Physician labor supply, financial incentives, and access to healthcare

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Outline

- 1 Motivation
- 2 Institutional background
- 3 Data
- 4 Identification strategy
- 5 Results

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Why do we (health)care?

The access to healthcare

- (OECD) Policy objective: Improving the access to healthcare
- Problems: Medical deserts, primary care provider shortages
- Extensive margin: Entry (*numerus clausus*), exit (later retirement), migration (foreign doctors)
- Intensive margin: Increasing labor supply with higher financial incentives?

Do physicians respond to financial incentives?

- Mixed evidence (to say the least), depending on country and time
- No: Small elasticities (in the U.S.: Rizzo and Blumenthal 1994, Showalter and Thurston 1997)
- Yes... but in which direction? Income vs. substitution effects
 - ▶ *Positive* price elasticity of the provision of care (*Substitution effects dominate*): Clemens and Gottlieb (2014) in the U.S. (Medicare) find 1.5
 - ▶ *Negative* price elasticity of the provision of care (*Income effects dominate*): Early ('70s-'80s) U.S. studies based on time series, Coudin et al. (2015) in France, Fortin et al. (2021) in Canada

This paper

- Estimates the **price elasticity of the provision of healthcare** by **French general practitioners** (GPs) between 2016 and 2018
- Exploits a policy-induced shock on financial incentives
- The regulator, namely the French public health insurance (Cnam), agreed to revalue sector 1 GPs' visits from **May 1, 2017** onward
- Reimbursement rate increased from **€23 to €25 (+8.7%)**
- Claims data: *Système National des Données de Santé* (SNDS)
 - ▶ Comprehensive information on claim files for the universe of French patients and physicians
- Identification strategy: **DiD**
 - ▶ **Treatment: Sector 1 GPs**
 - ▶ Various possible **comparison groups**: **Direct access specialists, Sector 2 GPs, Sector 1 GPs in 2016**, etc.

Preview of results

- **Elasticity** of GPs' activity wrt price: **1, on average**
- **Heterogeneity** in response to financial incentives: **Early-career (30-39)** doctors most price-sensitive (price-elasticity of **2**) while old-age physicians (60-69) almost inelastic
 - ▶ Consistent with stronger income effect at older ages (life-cycle)
- Mechanisms:
 - ▶ Essentially **no change in** the number of visits per patient (**Intensity of care**)
 - ▶ **Higher number of patients (Access to healthcare)**
 - ★ Physicians work **more days (+4%)**
 - ★ Physicians see **more patients per day (+5%)**
 - ▶ The number of patients for whom they are *médecin traitant* increased (about +4%)
 - ★ Consistent with doctors admitting **new patients**, and becoming their *médecin traitant*
 - ▶ Decrease in drug prescription (per patient), especially antibiotics
 - ▶ Little change in travel times from patients to doctors

Cost for public health insurance: about €0.5bn/yr, hence a rather cost-effective policy to enhance the access to healthcare, with limited adverse effects on the intensity of care

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French GPs

About 60% of the 100,000 GPs in France are self-employed

They choose either sector 1 or sector 2 upon start of a new practice

- Sector 1: Regulated fees but reduced social contributions
- Sector 2: Unregulated fees (Free-billing within 'ethical' limits, i.e. with *tact et mesure*, e.g. not allowed to charge extra fees to low-income patients)

Tightened access to sector 2 since 1990 (Coudin et al. 2015): Eligibility conditions include

- Qualifying university teaching for at least 2 years
- Some hospital practice

Cannot switch from sector 1 (absorbing state) to sector 2

Regulated fees

May 1, 2017: Increase in sector 1 GPs' visit fees from €23 to €25

- A +8.7% policy-induced shock on financial incentives
- Publicly disclosed at the end of the *Convention médicale* (August 25, 2016), at the end of a bargaining session between Cnam and physicians' unions (MG France, etc.)

Other shocks (coming soon?):

- November 1, 2023: €26.5 (+6%)
- December 22, 2024: €30 (+13.2%)

Comparison with other OECD countries: €46 on average

- UK: €0 (public), €95-€315 (private)
- Spain: €0 (public), €30-€40 (private)
- Germany, Italy, the Netherlands: about €75
- Switzerland: about €100
- Portugal: €40-€70
- Belgium: €25

Patients

Patients choose their GPs freely based on public information (sector and fees)

Copayment scheme:

- 70% of the service reference price is reimbursed by public health insurance
- 30% of that price may be reimbursed by private health insurance
- Extra fees (sector 2): either (partly) covered by private health insurance or out-of-pocket (OOP)
- In 2017, 4% of population is deprived of private health insurance

Specialists

Direct access specialists:

- Gynecologists
- Ophthalmologists
- Pediatricians
- Stomatologists

can be consulted without any referral as opposed to other specialists (e.g., dermatologists, endocrinologists, etc.)

The latter experienced a €2 increase in their specific surcharges from July 1, 2017 onward

Reimbursed fees of some specialists also increased from July 1, 2017 onward:

- Cardiologists
- Psychiatrists
- Pediatricians (according to some price scheme that depends on the child's age)

In what follows: Direct access specialists at the exclusion of pediatricians

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Comprehensive database

Universe of French patients and physicians observed from 2016 to 2018

- Unique wrt to the U.S., for instance (Medicare: 65+ patients only)

Granularity: Claims files at the visit level with information on fees, drug prescription, etc.

Sample restrictions:

- Non-missing information on physicians' gender, age, and location
- Non-missing information on population, density, and *Accessibilité Potentielle Localisée* (APL) of municipality of practice
- Mainland France (Metropolitan France at the exclusion of Corsica)
- Healthcare providers: GPs and direct access specialists

Aggregation of the data: Physician-month level (mostly)

Working sample

- Self-employed physicians
- General practitioners (GPs), either sector 1 or sector 2
- Direct access specialists (gynecologists, ophthalmologists, stomatologists)
- Aged 30 to 79
- Period: January 2016-October 2018
 - ▶ Excluding November and December 2018 because of right-censoring
 - ▶ Processing time for claim files may last up to 40 days

About 55,000 GPs in January 2016

- NB Practices for now, but ultimately doctors

Aggregation at the physician-month(-day) level: about 1.8M (33M) observations

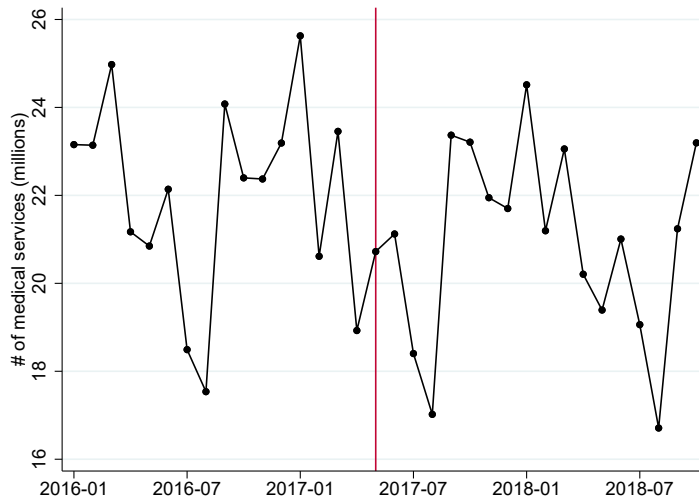
Activity

Number of active GPs

Share of sector 1 GPs

Heterogeneity among GPs

Evolution of GPs' activity between January 2016 and October 2018



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DiD

Identification strategy

- Treatment (T): Sector 1 GPs
- Comparison (C): Direct access specialists

Alternate identification strategies

- T: Sector 1 GPs, C: Sector 2 GPs
- T: Sector 1 GPs in 2017, C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016

Rely on

- SUTVA (see later)
- CTA

Summary statistics (Doctors)

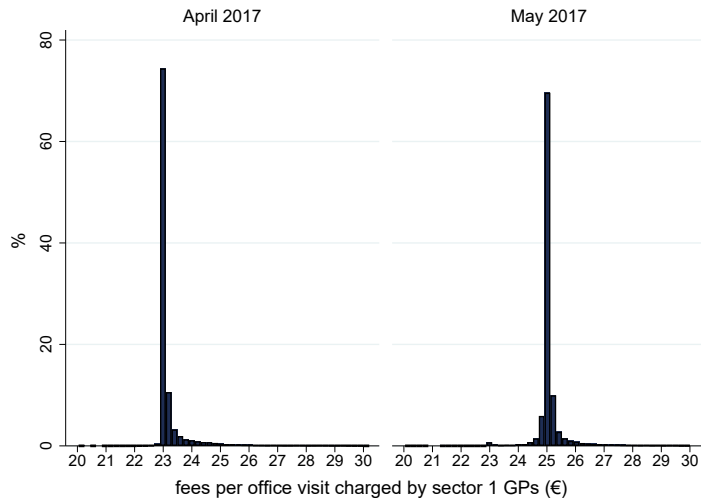
Possible to (fully) match sector 1 GPs and direct access specialists in January 2016 on the basis of age, gender, and location (namely, density and classification into categories of medical deserts)

Table 1: Summary statistics - Balancing checks

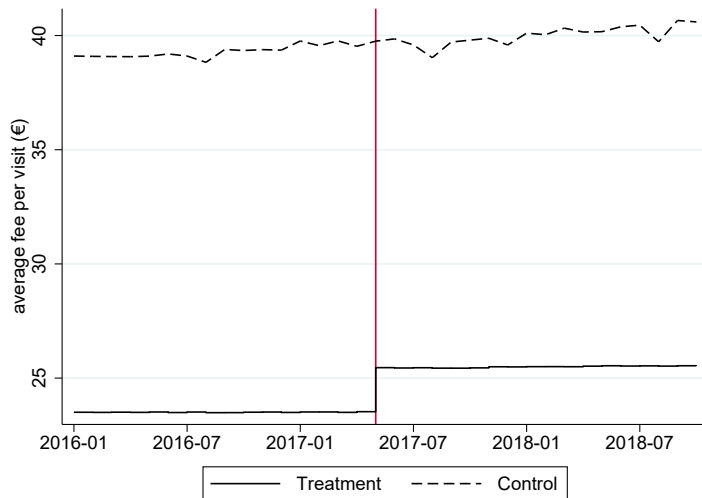
	Sector 1 GPs	Sector 2 GPs	Direct access specialists (Matched)	Direct access specialists (Unmatched)
Women	0.357	0.287	0.315	0.471
Age	53.2	62.2	52.8	57.2
Paris region	0.133	0.406	0.149	0.238
Dense area	0.367	0.658	0.369	0.612
Intermediate density	0.337	0.264	0.387	0.349
Weakly dense	0.290	0.075	0.242	0.039
Not dense	0.006	0.003	0.002	0.001
Medical desert (ZIP)	0.173	0.191	0.165	0.113
ZAC	0.528	0.561	0.543	0.548
Not a medical desert	0.299	0.248	0.291	0.339
Share of female patients	0.580	0.647	0.600	0.655
Share of 65+ patients	0.297	0.312	0.324	0.295
Observations	50630	4750	6474	6474

Note. Sample means computed in January 2016.

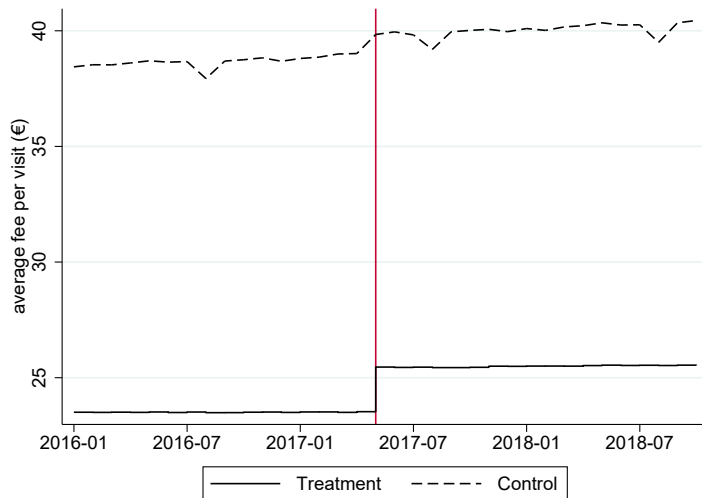
Evolution of fees (Sector 1 GPs)



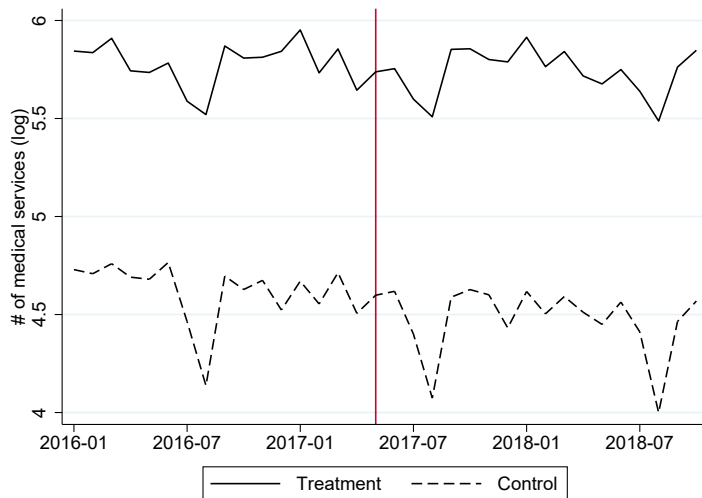
Evolution of doctors' fees - Comparison group: Direct access specialists



Evolution of doctors' fees - Comparison group: Sector 2 GPs



The plausibility of the CTA - Activity (C: Direct access specialists)



Estimating equation

Notations: Doctor j , calendar month t , treatment dummy T , Post a dummy equal to 1 after May 1, 2017

$$Y_{jt} = \beta T_j \times \text{Post}_t + \alpha_j + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{jt} \quad (1)$$

Heterogeneity of TE: Possible to allow for β to depend on j or/and t :

- Time (to event): Event study
- Observed characteristics of physician

N.B. Same timing of treatment for all units (physicians) here

Clustering of standard errors: Physician level

Identification strategy #3 on the sole sector 1 GPs:

$$Y_{jmy} = \beta T_y \times \text{Post}_m + \alpha_{jy} + \gamma_m + \varepsilon_{jmy}, \quad (2)$$

where

- $m = 1, \dots, 12$ indexes months within year $y = 2016, 2017$
- $T_y = 1$ if $y = 2017$
- $\text{Post}_m = 1$ if $m \geq 5$

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Impact of the reform on activity (GPs)

Table 2: Impact of the reform on activity (C: Direct access specialists)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Post $\times$ Treatment	0.0905*** (0.00540)	0.0965*** (0.00572)	0.0879*** (0.00583)
Physician FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Month-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Excluding April and May 2017	No	Yes	Yes
Present in January 2016 and October 2018	No	No	Yes
Observations	1920379	1806757	1539472
R ²	0.886	0.884	0.885

Note. Dependent variable: Number of medical services per GP and per month (log).

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors at the physician level

Robustness checks

Table 3: Impact of the reform on activity - Robustness checks

Robustness check	Post $\times$ Treatment		Comparison group	Unit FE	Time FE	Observations	R ²
Activity (Sector 1 GPs)	0.0879***	(0.00488)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1742230	0.874
Activity (Sector 1 GPs)	0.0686***	(0.00165)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	1004277	0.877
Activity (Sector 2 GPs)	0.00803	(0.00736)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	336834	0.873
Pre-matching	0.120***	(0.0257)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1673711	0.876
Placebo reform (May 1, 2016)	0.0317	(0.0196)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	823477	0.906
Placebo reform (May 1, 2016)	0.0199	(0.0138)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	798915	0.902
Balanced panel	0.0804***	(0.00523)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1428580	0.871
Trimming	0.0961***	(0.00602)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1779080	0.882
Paris seasonality	0.0941***	(0.00872)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1806757	0.886

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors at the physician level

Impact of the reform on various outcomes

Table 4: Impact of the reform on various outcomes

Dependent variable	Post $\times$ Treatment		Comparison group	Unit FE	Time FE	Observations	R ²
Activity (per month, log)	0.0965***	(0.00572)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1806757	0.884
Health insurance spending (per month, log)	0.172***	(0.00584)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1806529	0.885
# of patients (per month, log)	0.105***	(0.00573)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1806757	0.885
# of services (per patient, log)	0.00239***	(0.000677)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1742230	0.806
# of patients (per day, log)	0.0506***	(0.00364)	DA specialists	Physician	Day-year	33826817	0.507
# of workdays (per month, log)	0.0418***	(0.00278)	DA specialists	Physician	Month-year	1806757	0.723
Probability of retirement	-0.00593***	(0.00204)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	344600	0.812
# of patients as <i>médecin traitant</i> (per month, log)	0.0398***	(0.00154)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	922795	0.932
Share of home visits	-0.00443***	(0.000214)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	1004277	0.943
Share of women among patients	-0.00190***	(0.000244)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	1004277	0.714
Share of 65+ among patients	-0.0138***	(0.000262)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	1004277	0.892
Share of patients living in same city	-0.00174***	(0.000282)	Sector 1 GPs in 2016	Physician-year	Month	1004277	0.951
All drugs (per patient, log €)	-0.0442***	(0.00554)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1742208	0.856
Antibiotics (per patient, log €)	-0.0925***	(0.00611)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1685289	0.735
Antidepressants (per patient, log €)	-0.0318***	(0.00664)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1623056	0.818
Opioids (per patient, log €)	-0.0367***	(0.00910)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1640372	0.771
All drugs + reimbursed fees (per patient, log €)	-0.0154***	(0.00308)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1742230	0.792
All drugs + reimbursed fees (log €)	0.0701***	(0.00381)	Sector 2 GPs	Physician	Month-year	1742230	0.939

Note. DA: Direct access. April and May 2017 are excluded from estimation samples.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors at the physician level

Impact on travel times

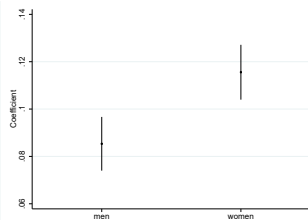
Table 5: Impact of the reform on travel times between patients and GPs (in minutes)

Dependent variable	mean	sd	p10	p25	p50	p75	p90
Post × Treatment	-0.0652 (0.0399)	-0.174** (0.0802)	-0.0599** (0.0298)	-0.0342 (0.0302)	-0.00367 (0.0360)	-0.0283 (0.0551)	-0.106 (0.105)
Physician FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Month-year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1101847	1095290	1101847	1101847	1101847	1101847	1101847
R ²	0.726	0.685	0.527	0.644	0.719	0.616	0.575

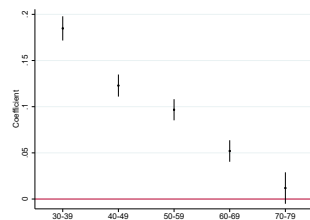
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors at the physician level

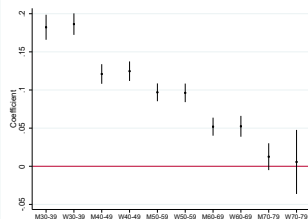
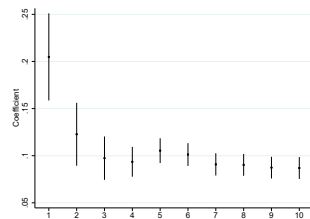
Heterogeneity of TE - 1



(a) Gender

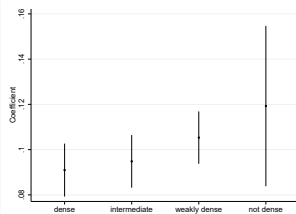


(b) Age

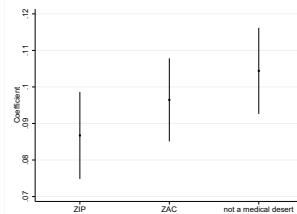
(c) Age $\times$ gender

(d) Income (in 2016)

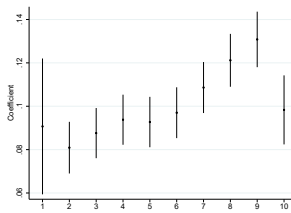
Heterogeneity of TE - 2



(a) Location



(b) Medical deserts



(c) Competition (Proxy: Share of multiple-source patients)

Impact of the July 1, 2017 reform on activity (Specialists)

Table 6: Impact of the reform on activity for psychiatrists and cardiologists (T: Sector 1, C: Sector 2)

	Cardiologists	Psychiatrists
Post $\times$ Treatment	0.0118 (0.0132)	-0.0199** (0.00863)
Physician FE	Yes	Yes
Month-year FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	125740	183473
R ²	0.863	0.817

Note. Dependent variable: Number of medical services per physician and per month (log).

April and May 2017 are excluded from estimation samples.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors at the physician level.

Who are the 'new patients'? (Preliminary)

Patient-level analysis:

$$\text{Visit}_{it} = \beta_i \text{Post}_t \times T_{c(i)} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

Treatment dummy $T_{c(i)}$ equal to 1 when patient i resides in a city c with at least one sector 1 GP

(Preliminary) Results (based on a random 1/100 subsample of French patients):

- Zero impact on monthly probability of visiting sector 1 GPs after May 1, 2016 (Placebo)
- Positive impact on monthly probability of visiting sector 1 GPs after May 1, 2017
- Decreasing effect with patients' age:
 - ▶ Children (0-9) visit more often
 - ▶ Seniors (60⁺) visit less often
- No significant difference for patients with chronic disease
- Amplified spatial inequality in access to healthcare ('Mathew effect')?
 - ▶ Patients living in under-served areas (ZIP, i.e. medical deserts) visit less
 - ▶ To a smaller extent, also true for less deprived areas (ZAC)
 - ▶ Patients living in non under-served areas visit more

Other outcome: Emergency_{it} (annual probability of visiting emergency department after May 1, 2017)

- Zero effect

Conclusion

Summary

- Exogenous variation in sector 1 GPs' fees on May 1, 2017
 - ▶ Quasi-experimental research design
 - ▶ Comprehensive, granular data at the physician-month(-day) level
 - ▶ High external validity
- Physicians respond to financial incentives with a unitary price elasticity of care provision, on average
- Heterogeneity of response: Early-career doctors, mostly

Policy implications

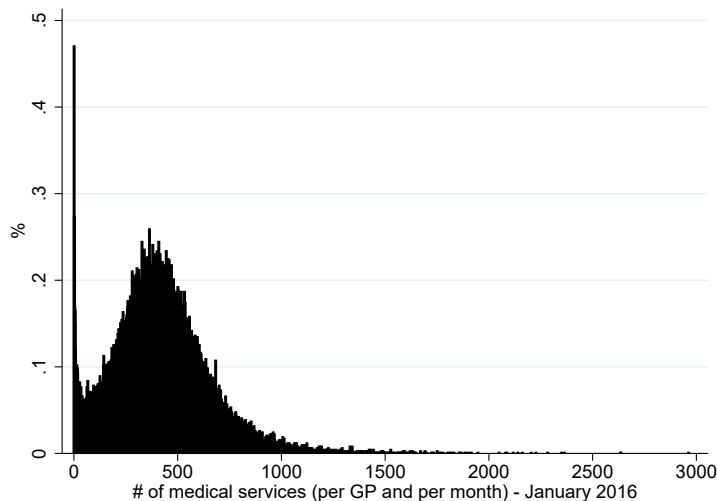
- **Cost-effective policy to enhance the access to healthcare**
- **Limited adverse effects on the intensity of care**
- **Targeting: Newly graduates at the exit of medical schools**

Extensions

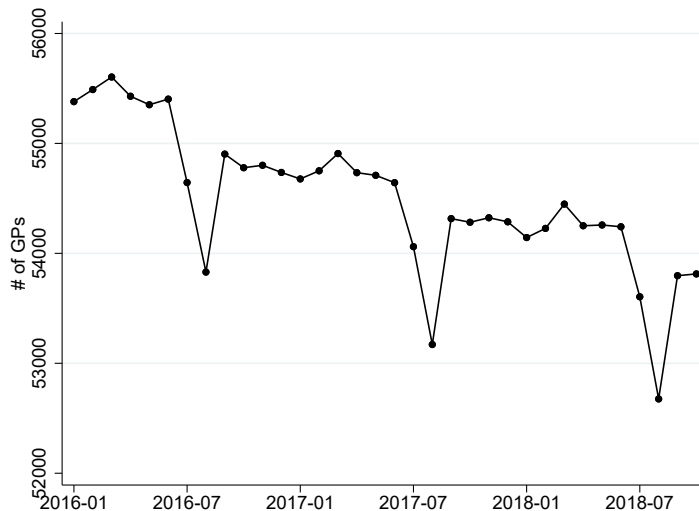
- Other outcomes: **Quality of care?** Referrals to other healthcare providers?
- Future increases in doctors' fees (**2023: €26.5 per visit, 2024: €30**)

Appendix

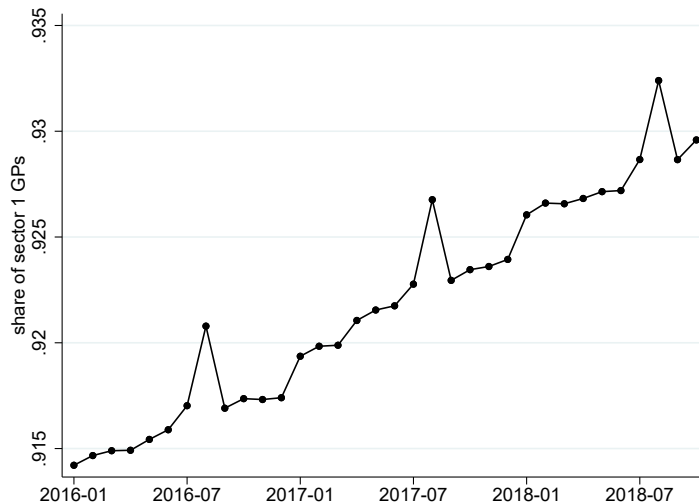
Activity (Number of medical services per month) in January 2016



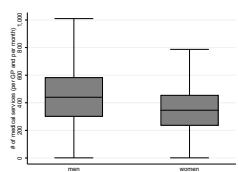
Number of active GPs in sample



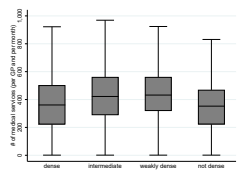
Share of sector 1 GPs in sample



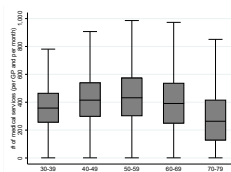
Heterogeneity among GPs



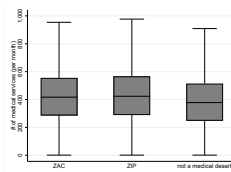
(a) Gender



(c) Density of area



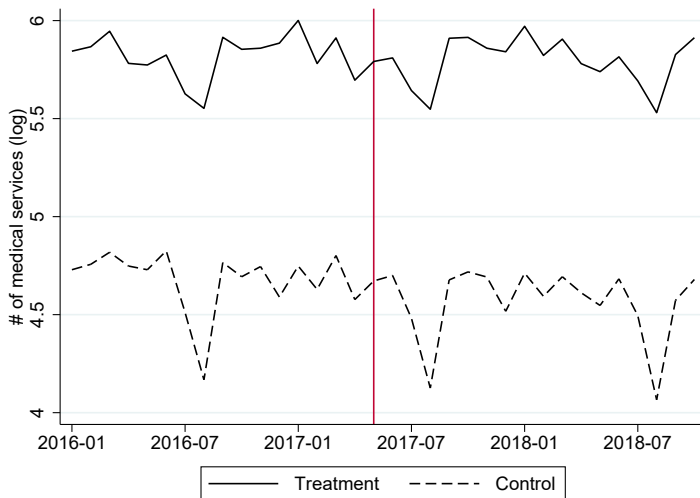
(b) Age



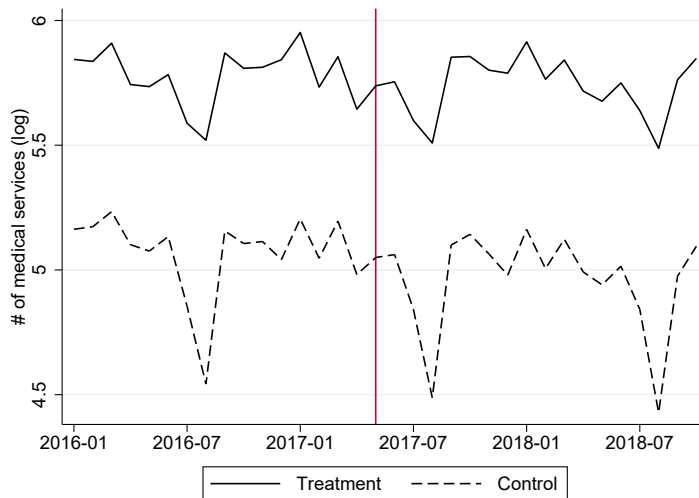
(d) Medical desert

Figure 3: GPs' activity, depending on various dimensions

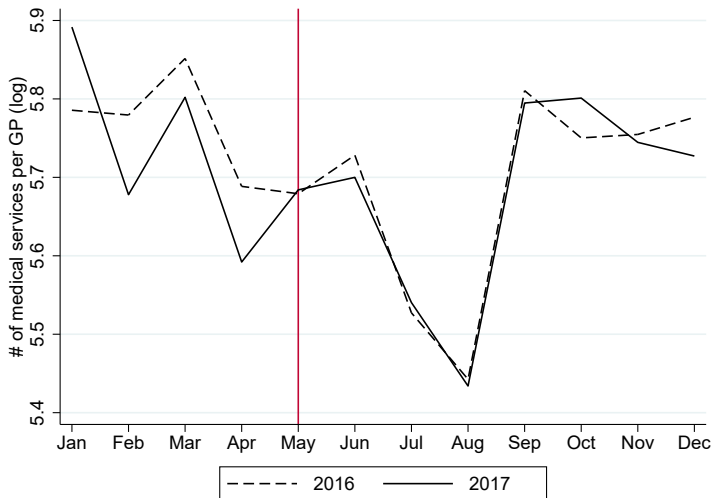
The plausibility of the CTA - Activity (C: Matched direct access specialists)



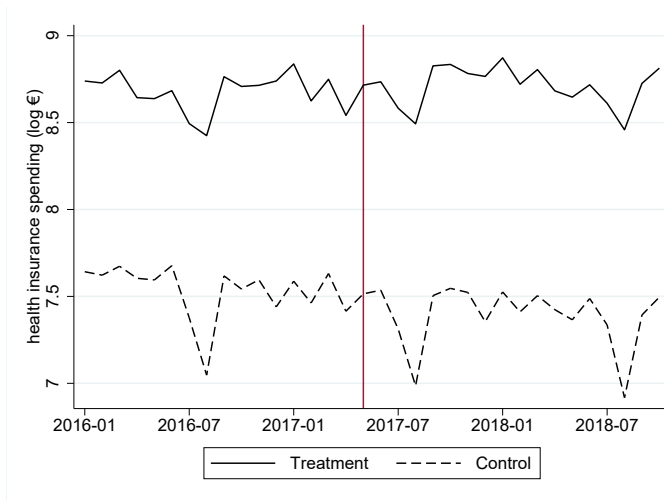
The plausibility of the CTA - Activity (C: Sector 2 GPs)



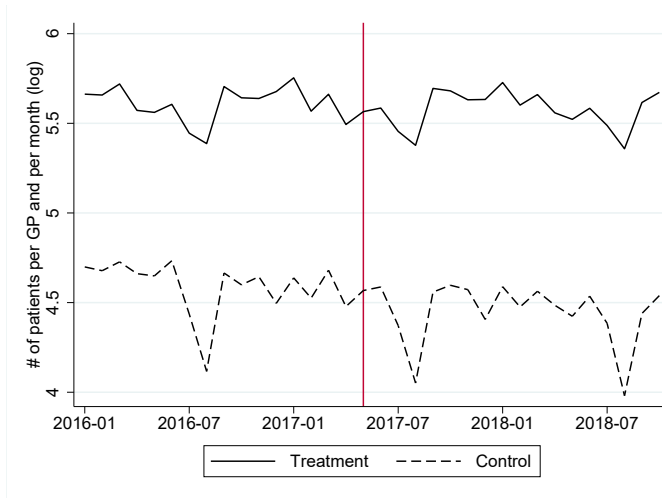
The plausibility of the CTA - Activity (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



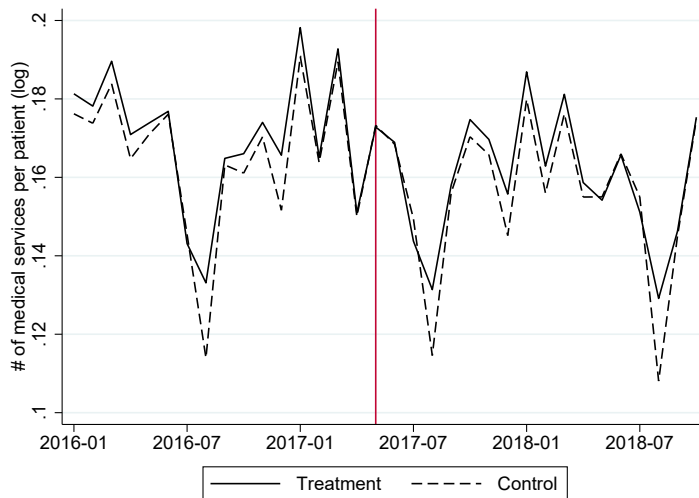
The plausibility of the CTA - Health insurance spending (C: Direct access specialists)



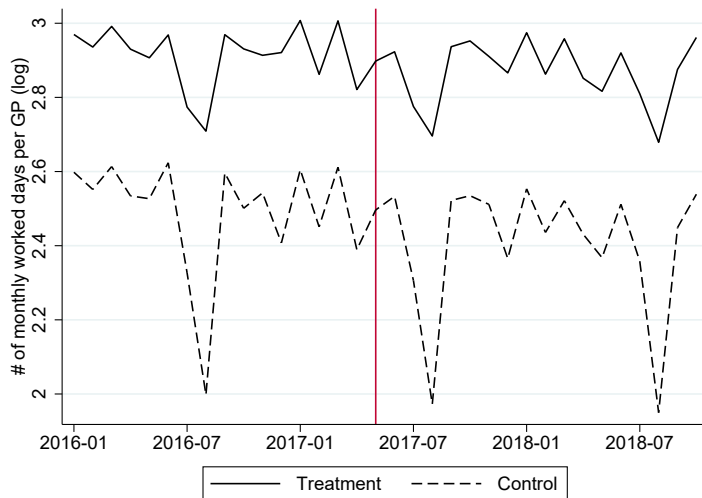
The plausibility of the CTA - Number of patients per month (C: Direct access specialists)



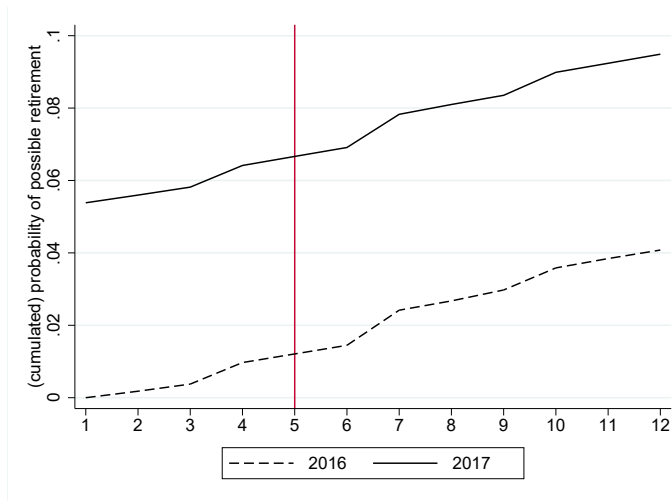
The plausibility of the CTA - Intensity of care (C: Sector 2 GPs)



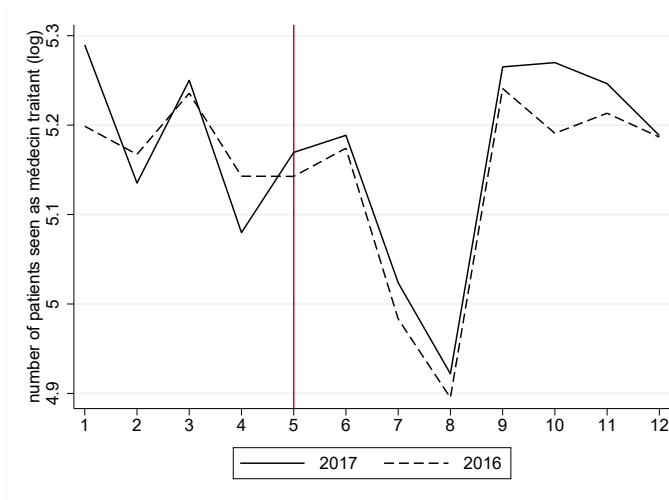
The plausibility of the CTA - Workload (C: Direct access specialists)



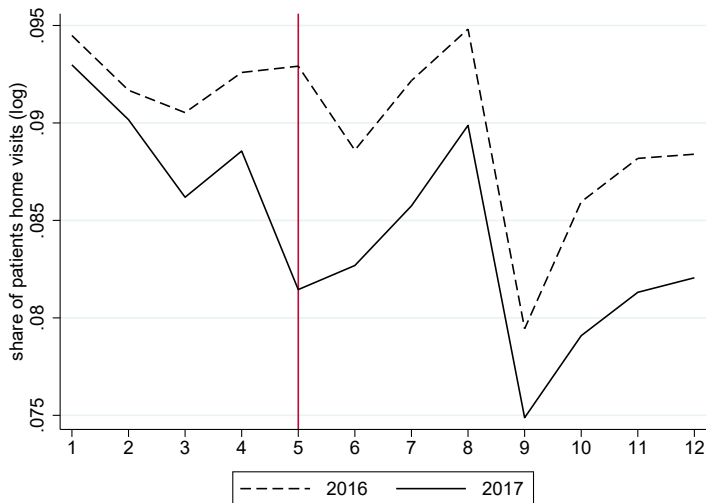
The plausibility of the CTA - Probability of retirement (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



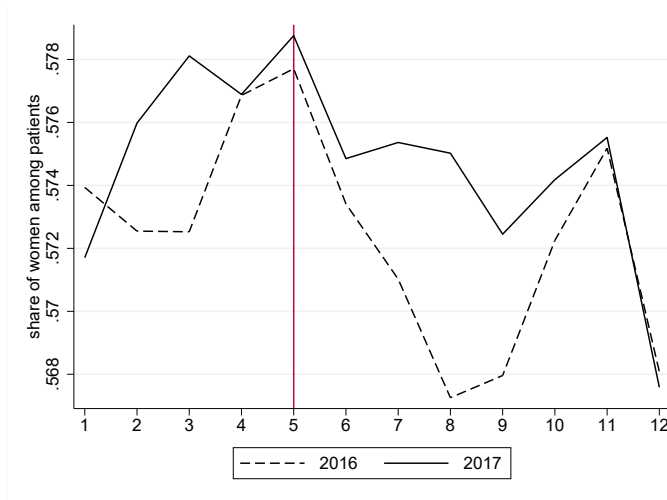
The plausibility of the CTA - Number of patients seen as a *médecin traitant* (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



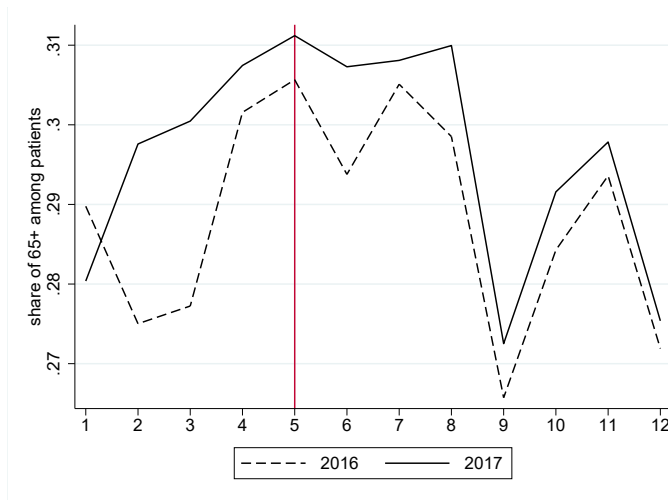
The plausibility of the CTA - Share of home visits (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



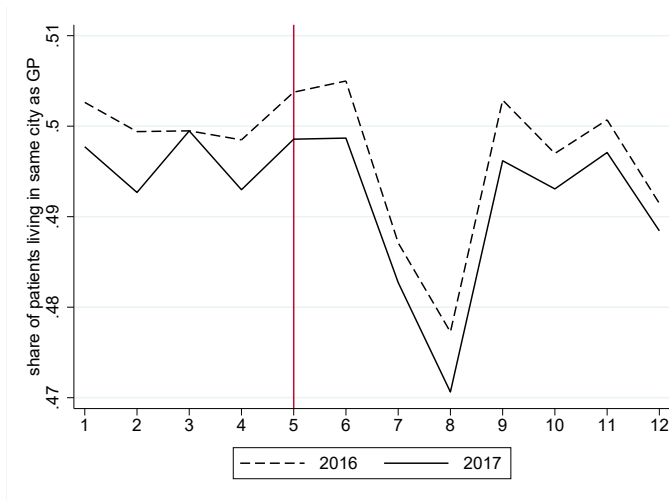
The plausibility of the CTA - Share of women among patients (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



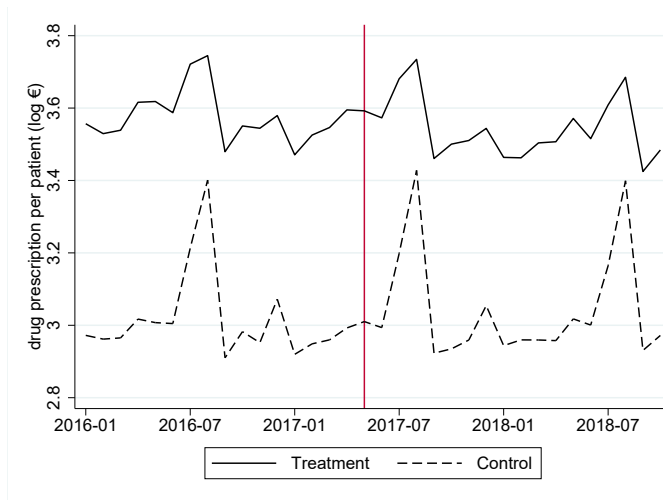
The plausibility of the CTA - Share of 65+ among patients (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



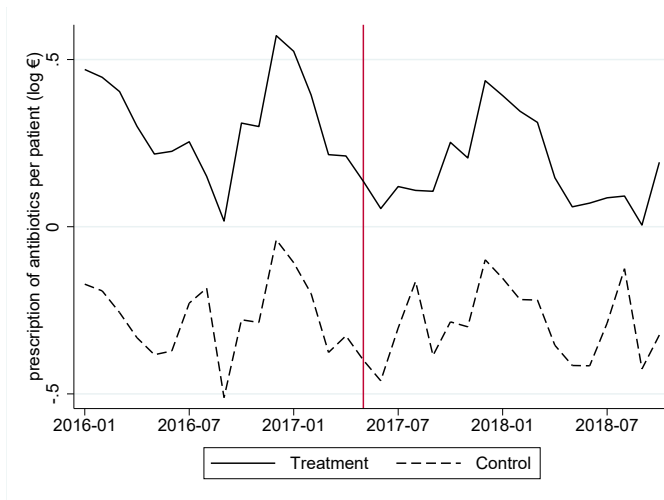
The plausibility of the CTA - Share of patients living in the same city (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



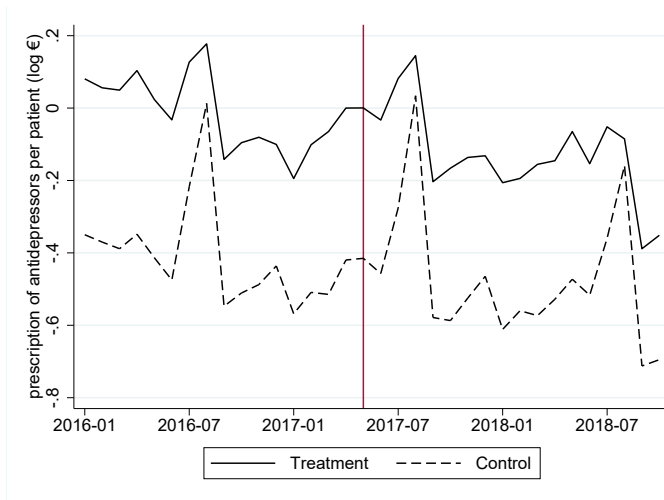
The plausibility of the CTA - Drug prescription (per patient) (C: Sector 2 GPs)



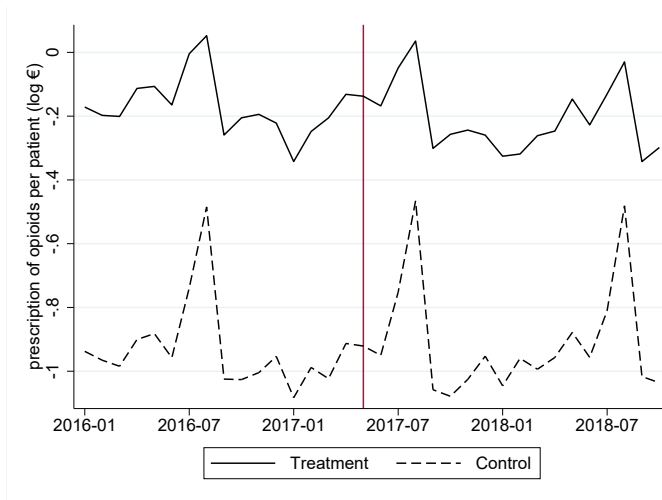
The plausibility of the CTA - Antibiotics prescription (per patient) (C: Sector 2 GPs)



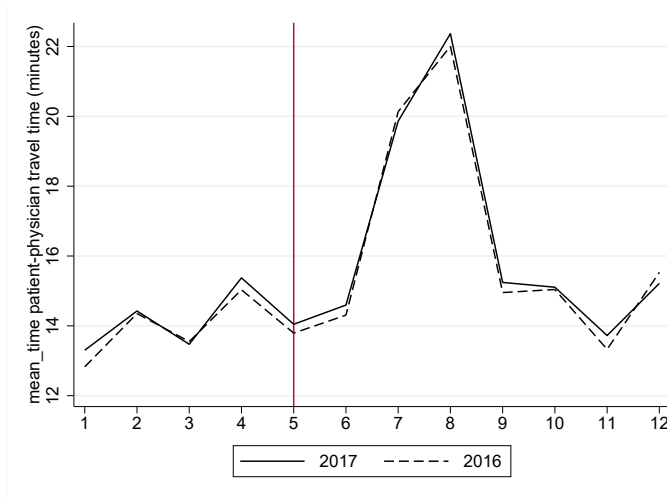
The plausibility of the CTA - Antidepressants prescription (per patient) (C: Sector 2 GPs)



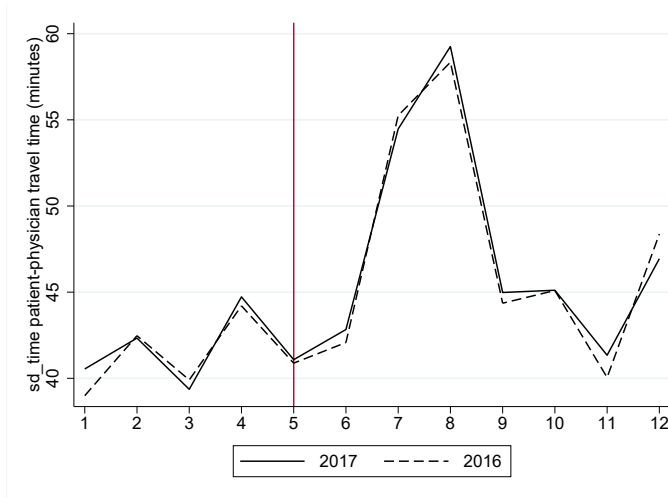
The plausibility of the CTA - Opioids prescription (per patient) (C: Sector 2 GPs)



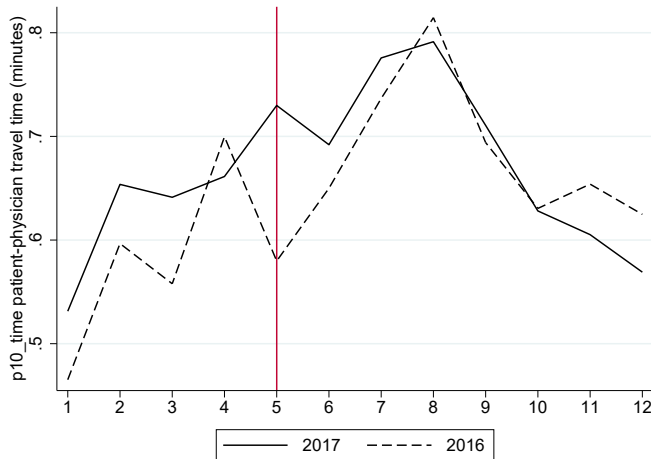
The plausibility of the CTA - Mean travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



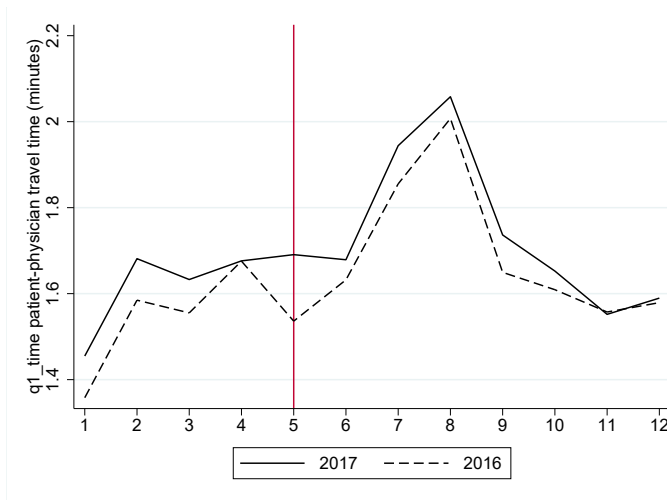
The plausibility of the CTA - Variance of travel times from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



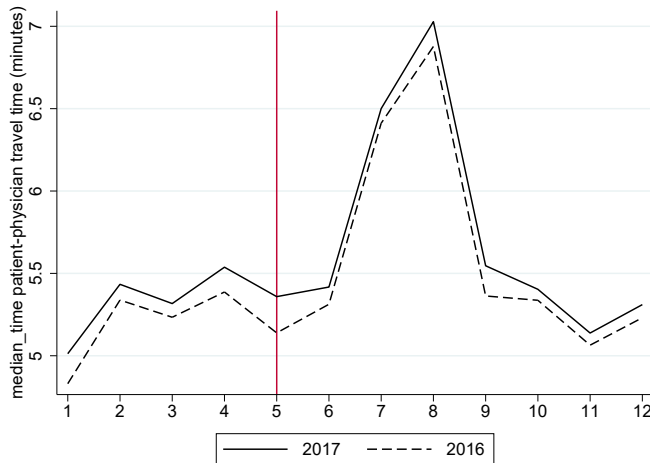
The plausibility of the CTA - P10 of travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



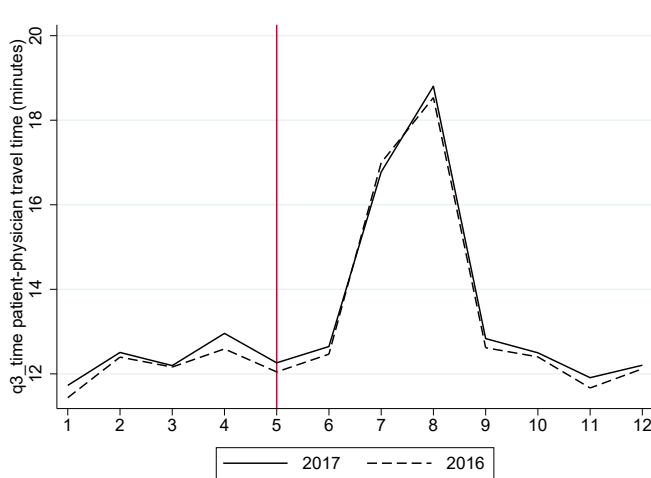
The plausibility of the CTA - P25 of travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



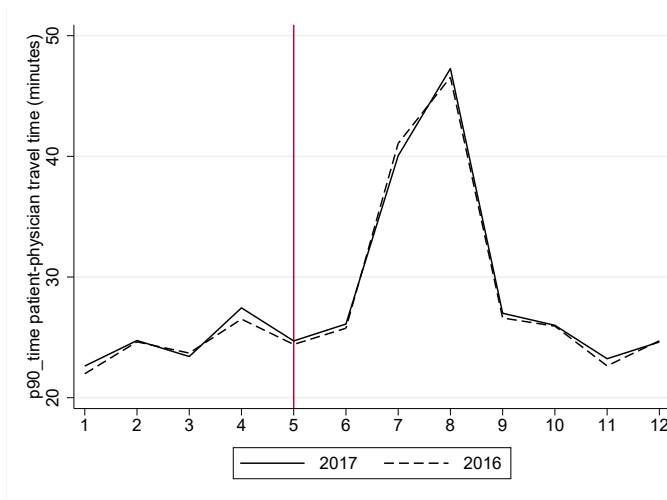
The plausibility of the CTA - P50 of travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



The plausibility of the CTA - P75 of travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)



The plausibility of the CTA - P90 of travel time from patient to physician (C: Sector 1 GPs in 2016)

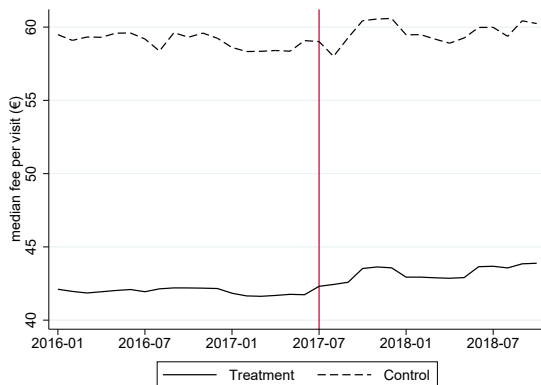


Heterogeneity of TE - *Ceteris paribus*

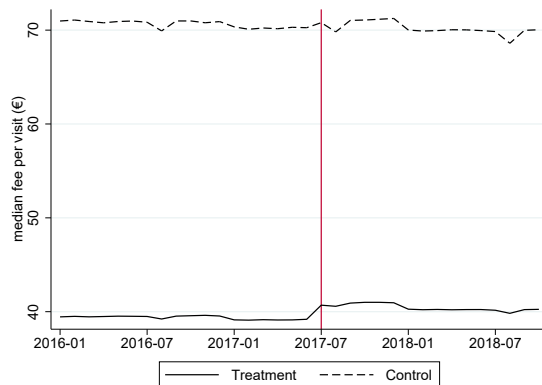
Table 7: Heterogeneity of the response to financial incentives (Activity)

Post + Treatment	1.237*** (0.479)
Medical density + Post + Treatment	1.425*** (0.578)
Age (ref: 70-79)	
30-39 + Post + Treatment	0.138*** (0.049)
40-49 + Post + Treatment	0.137*** (0.051)
50-59 + Post + Treatment	0.0986*** (0.040)
60-69 + Post + Treatment	0.0448*** (0.040)
Gender (ref: men)	
Women + Post + Treatment	-0.0205 (0.053)
Density of area (ref: above)	
Intermediate + Post + Treatment	0.00008 (0.001)
Weakly above + Post + Treatment	0.00047** (0.0001)
Not above + Post + Treatment	0.0001 (0.001)
Medical density classification (ref: not a medical area)	
2SF + Post + Treatment	-0.00108 (0.001)
2AC + Post + Treatment	-0.00122 (0.001)
Number (in 2016, ref: Group 1)	
Group 1 + Post + Treatment	0.00027 (0.001)
Group 2 + Post + Treatment	-0.0019 (0.001)
Group 3 + Post + Treatment	0.00127 (0.001)
Group 4 + Post + Treatment	0.00136** (0.0004)
Group 5 + Post + Treatment	0.00071 (0.001)
Group 6 + Post + Treatment	0.00114*** (0.0004)
Group 7 + Post + Treatment	0.00087*** (0.0004)
Group 8 + Post + Treatment	0.00082*** (0.0004)
Group 9 + Post + Treatment	0.00082*** (0.0004)
Group 10 + Post + Treatment	0.00114** (0.0004)
Mean of doctors (ref: Group 1)	
Group 1 + Post + Treatment	-0.00108 (0.001)
Group 2 + Post + Treatment	0.00082 (0.0004)
Group 3 + Post + Treatment	0.00082*** (0.0004)
Group 4 + Post + Treatment	0.00082 (0.0004)
Group 5 + Post + Treatment	0.00082 (0.0004)
Group 6 + Post + Treatment	0.00114*** (0.0004)
Group 7 + Post + Treatment	0.00082 (0.0004)
Group 8 + Post + Treatment	0.00082*** (0.0004)
Group 9 + Post + Treatment	0.00082*** (0.0004)
Group 10 + Post + Treatment	0.00114*** (0.0004)
Observations	76
Constant	0.627*** (0.00001)
Observations	171708
R ²	0.01
Heterogeneity analysis: number of eligible doctors (in SF and per month (kg))	
Control model: linear with physician fixed	
*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1	

Change in specialists' fees



(a) Cardiologists



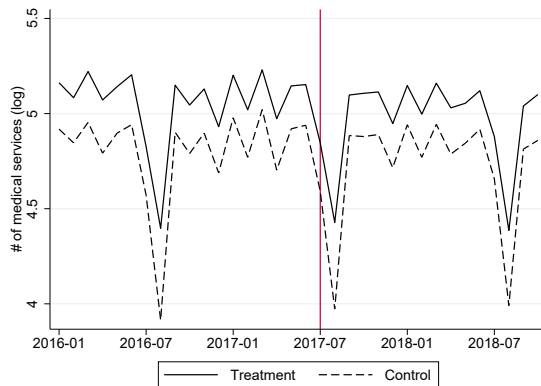
(b) Psychiatrists

Figure 4: Change in specialists' fees (T: Sector 1, C: Sector 2)

Evolution of specialists' activity



(a) Cardiologists



(b) Psychiatrists

Figure 5: Evolution of specialists' activity (T: Sector 1, C: Sector 2)