

Patients' Perceptions Towards Telehealth vs. Traditional In-person Doctor Visits

Background:

Health care visits have conventionally taken place inside of a clinic where patients meet face-to-face with their primary care provider. However, the recent challenges associated with the COVID pandemic over the past few years have brought many changes, one of those changes being the sudden widespread emergence of telehealth. Despite the potential benefits, or limitations, that telemedicine provides to healthcare few studies have been done to determine how patients feel about telehealth and the impacts on their quality of care. The primary outcome of this study aims to determine if telemedicine has room to grow in the health care field or if traditional in-person visits should remain the mainstay in order to provide patients with the best possible care.

Methods:

The study population included patients who had visited the behavioral health clinic and have had previous experience with both in-person and virtual doctor appointments, in which this clinic offers both. A survey was utilized in this study to obtain quantitative data from patients regarding their experience with telehealth compared to traditional health care appointments. The survey consisted of 15 questions regarding opinions about various aspects of telehealth and traditional in-person doctor visits. Answers were provided using a six-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Results:

A total of 53 patients completed the survey. Patients who answered either strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree, were grouped together as a general "agree" response. Patients who answered either strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat disagree, were grouped together as a general "disagree" response. Among the 53 patients, 64% of patients prefer telehealth/virtual doctor visits compared to traditional in-person visits, with the largest group strongly agreeing (28%). A total of 39 patients out of 53 (74%) agree that they receive the same quality of care no matter which method of doctor visit they undergo.

Conclusion:

The majority of the patients in this study prefer telehealth visits over traditional in-person appointments. Patients also agree that telehealth offers provide them with thorough medical assessments and the same quality of care that traditional visits offer. These results justify the need for healthcare institutions to reallocate resources in order to offer telehealth visits to their patients. This applies particularly to institutions in the behavioral health care setting, such as the one in this study, and similar clinics should reevaluate their need to offer access to virtual visits or allow for continued use of them if they are already established. According to this survey, the demand for telehealth visits will continue to increase as more and more patients express the desire for virtual and telehealth visits to become more common in health care.