



Effective Health Care

Use of Telehealth/Virtual Health by Patients

Next Steps

The nominator is looking for evidence on when and where virtual care may be appropriate. She worries that it has become the panacea for limited access to clinical care with little or no evidence of which medical conditions are best evaluated and treated in this manner and what the trade-offs of such a care model might be.

The AHRQ EPC Program recently conducted a Technical Brief and a systematic review addressing use of telehealth for acute and chronic care consultations in is currently underway. This addresses the nominator's request and therefore no further activity will be undertaken on this topic.

Summary

Topic Name and Number: #820, Use of Telehealth/Virtual Health by Patients.

Date: 3/12/2019

Key question(s) from the nomination:

For which medical conditions [acute, chronic, or intermittent] is the use of telehealth/virtual health a proper replacement for in person clinical evaluation which lead to improved outcomes and overall decreased use of health care resources?

- Telehealth is the use of information and telecommunications technology to provide or support health care across time and/or distance. It is a tool with the potential to increase access, improve the quality of care, increase patient satisfaction, positively impact patient outcomes, and reduce the cost of care.¹
- Telehealth includes several different technologies that are not treatments or interventions in and of themselves, rather the technologies are used to expand access, exchange information, and deliver care in alternate formats. Technologies such as remote patient monitoring and videoconferencing can be used to expand specialty care to seriously ill patients in intensive care units (ICUs), to patients in critical access hospitals, or to patients and providers in areas with shortages of health care providers.¹
- Technology can be used to extend primary care to remote areas and increase the frequency of patient and primary care provider interactions. Internet applications can be used to facilitate psychiatric treatment and other counseling. Devices can be used to evaluate status in patients with chronic conditions who need close monitoring.²
- The AHRQ EPC Program has published a technical brief that identified and described the body of research evidence available in the form of systematic reviews to inform decisions related to contemporary practice and policy issues about telehealth. It also identified areas where future systematic reviews might be helpful. One area identified was the use of consultation for acute and chronic management.³
- A systematic review is currently underway that addresses the effectiveness, harms, economic impact, adverse events and negative unintended consequences of telehealth for acute and chronic care consultations. It primarily focuses on technology to involve another provider, often a specialist, which can allow medical expertise to be available

where and when it is needed, minimizing potential time or geographic barriers to care and maximizing the efficient use of scarce resources.⁴

References

1. Castro D, Miller B, Nager A. Unlocking the Potential of Physician-to-Patient Telehealth Services. Washington, DC: Information Technology and Innovation Foundation; May 12, 2014. <http://www.itif.org/publications/unlocking-potential-physician-patient-telehealth-services> Accessed March 12, 2019.
2. Lustig T. The Role of Telehealth in an Evolving Health Care Environment - Workshop Summary. Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine; 2012.
3. Totten AM, Womack DM, Eden KB et al. Telehealth: Mapping the Evidence for Patient Outcomes From Systematic Reviews [Internet]. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US); 2016 Jun. PMID: 27536752 [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK379320/>]
4. Telehealth for Acute and Chronic Care Consultations. Research Protocol. [https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/telehealth-acute-chronic_research-protocol.pdf] Accessed March 13, 2019