

Telemedicine: A Game Changer in the Field of Medicine or a Gateway to New Problems

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To the Editor,

We aim to draw the reader's attention to the latest advancements in medical science, specifically telemedicine, by highlighting its importance and its challenges.

Telemedicine refers to the delivery of healthcare from or to a remote location using electronic devices such as computers, phones, or laptops with internet access [1]. It is an effective, hassle-free way to receive quality treatment without physically being at the required location. This innovation requires the use of electronic devices that enable healthcare providers to communicate with patients and guide or treat them regarding their health concerns.

In 2019, when the world witnessed a surge in COVID-19 cases, the primary concern was to prevent the spread of this deadly virus. This could be achieved by limiting contact between people and advising everyone to stay at home. During this time, telemedicine gained significant importance among healthcare professionals and related personnel. A study including 36 million working-age individuals showed that telemedicine encounters increased by 766% in the first three months of the pandemic [2]. In the United Nations, 76% of patients are in contact with healthcare personnel through telemedicine [3].

Telemedicine has transformed the medical field with numerous benefits, including—but not limited to—creating a pollution-free environment by eliminating travel requirements and thereby reducing vehicle emissions, and allowing consultations in a comfortable setting. It provides a smooth and efficient mode of healthcare delivery for both physicians and patients. People living in rural areas can now receive treatment without traveling long distances. Especially during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of telemedicine increased significantly, allowing healthcare personnel to guide patients remotely and thereby reducing the risk of infection. Telemedicine also greatly reduces the risk of acquiring nosocomial infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, or HIV. A survey conducted in 2020 showed

that about 56.2% of patients preferred telemedicine with their doctors, especially during the pandemic (55%), because it reduced the transmission of disease and travel costs [4]. Another study that included 93 participants showed that a high level of exhaustion was observed in 26.7% of healthcare workers who did not practice telemedicine, compared with 12.5% of those who did [5].

However, the challenges of this modern-day technology are also significant. These include employee isolation, reduced workplace engagement, and the lack of physical examinations, which may lead to misdiagnosis or improper patient guidance. Moreover, many states require a doctor–patient relationship before prescribing medications. For example, Arkansas requires a face-to-face episode of care before providing treatment [6]. Additionally, the use of telemedicine is limited by network availability, access to appropriate devices, and the presence of trained operators.

One study presented the effectiveness of training rural paraplegics in telemedicine computer skills and reported that training and knowledge of telecommunication skills are necessary to understand telehealth use in hospitals in Rawalpindi, Pakistan [7]. Ministry of National Health Services and Regulation (NHSRC) states that “Every LTP practicing telemedicine in Pakistan shall be required to obtain the prescribed telemedicine certification by completing the required mandatory online training offered by the authorized training institutes. Every LTP completing the training shall be recorded as a Certified Telemedicine Practitioner and shall be represented on their license” [8]. This highlights the need for specialized training programs and workshops to enable clinicians to consult patients effectively and smoothly. In that regard, many universities, such as UHS, are offering online courses in telemedicine.

Telemedicine serves as an important link between healthcare providers and patients. This innovative use of technology has enabled many individuals to receive treatment and medical opinions without traveling, waiting in long queues, or being exposed to infections. Telemedicine has transformed doctor–patient interactions and opened new avenues for healthcare delivery. It is a rapidly developing technology that

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continues to reshape how people perceive and access the healthcare system.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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