Abstract

Experiences of Connecticut Community Health Center Patients With Telemedicine During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Roberta Delvy[1], BA, BS; Emil Coman[2], PhD; Kelly Sanchez[3], MPH; Wizdom Powell[2], PhD; Thomas Agresta[3,4], MD

[1]School of Medicine, University of Connecticut, Farmington, CT, United States

[2]Health Disparities Institute, University of Connecticut, Farmington, CT, United States

[3]Center for Quantitative Medicine, University of Connecticut, Farmington, CT, United States

[4]Department of Family Medicine, University of Connecticut, Farmington, CT, United States

Corresponding Author:
Roberta Delvy, BA, BS
School of Medicine
University of Connecticut
263 Farmington Avenue
Farmington, CT, 06030
United States
Phone: 1 203 954 9286
Email: delvy@uchc.edu

Abstract

Background: Since COVID-19 rapidly made telemedicine a necessity, it is clear that virtual patient visits are going to be part of the new norm in continued outpatient care as we move into a postpandemic reality. However, we are still learning about patients' experiences and preferences amid the rapid and widespread deployment of telemedicine.

Objective: The aim of this paper is to determine patients' satisfaction with and experiences of telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic among those seeking care at Community Health Center Association of Connecticut member clinics.

Methods: Data were collected using a 24-question phone survey, which asked about telehealth use, frequency of telehealth visits, and barriers experienced. Participants were eligible if they aged 18 years or older, were English speaking, and were receiving care at 1 of 3 participating Community Health Center Association of Connecticut clinics.

Results: A total of 383 participants completed the phone survey throughout July 2021. The median age grouping was between 55 and 59 years, and the majority (63%) were female. Since COVID-19, in total, 78% reported having one or more audio-only telehealth visits (from 31% before), and 53% had one or more video telehealth visit (from 13% before). Most reported being very satisfied with their visits (86%) and that they felt confident in their provider's ability to address their needs (74%). Most did not experience technical problems or have difficulty understanding how to connect to their provider. Even among older participants (60 years and older), only 28% reported having difficulty understanding how to connect to their provider, compared with 23% of 40- to 59-year-old patients and 18% of 18- to 39-year-old patients. Moreover, 45% reported being very likely to continue using telehealth even after the pandemic. However, 52% would have liked the option of in-person visits if they had been available in the past year.

Conclusions: These results suggest that most patients find telehealth visits an appropriate and accessible means of accessing health care, though some still like the option of seeing their provider in person. Future work should compare provider and patient experiences and identify optimal means of making the encounters mutually satisfying and beneficial.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

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KEYWORDS

telemedicine; patient-physician relationship

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