

Telemedicine Improves Doctor-Patient Relationships



People living in rural areas often lack access to modern healthcare, and one approach used to address this problem is telemedicine. New research from the University of Missouri School of Medicine shows that video-based healthcare is effective for patients and helps enhance patient-provider interactions. The findings are reported in the journal *The Health Care Manager*.

Telemedicine uses technology such as video conferencing to bridge the distance between a patient and physician. "It allows patients to remain in their communities, saving them from undue hardships related to long-distance travel and time off work," said the study's lead author Mirna Becevic, PhD, an assistant research professor of telemedicine at the MU School of Medicine.

In telemedicine, the primary objective is to provide health services to patients. However, for telemedicine to be truly effective, it also must be beneficial to those who provide care, according to Dr. Becevic. "The goal of our study was to understand satisfaction levels of all telehealth users," she explained.

See Also: [Face-to-Face Consult Advised Before Telehealth](#)

For this study, the research team developed three surveys for patients, physicians and on-site equipment coordinators served by the Missouri Telehealth Network. The Missouri Telehealth Network was begun by the MU School of Medicine in 1994 to connect rural Missourians with physician specialists at MU Health Care. The network now offers 29 different clinical speciality services including behavioural health, dermatology and care for autism at 202 sites in 62 of Missouri's 114 counties.

Survey questions were related to perceived benefits such as ease of use, quality of care and acceptance as an alternative form of health services. Results of the survey revealed user satisfaction amongst all three groups:

- Of 286 patients surveyed, 83 percent felt they received skilled care during their telehealth visit and 78 percent agreed they would use the service again.
- Of 12 site coordinators surveyed, 67 percent agreed that telehealth appointments were easy to coordinate.
- 86 percent of 21 physicians surveyed were satisfied with the care they were able to provide patients via telehealth.

See Also: [Payment Barriers Deter Telehealth Adoption](#)

"Our study confirmed and validated the use of telehealth to care for rural patients," Dr. Becevic said. "Knowing the level of satisfaction amongst all users allows us to explore the possibility of expanding speciality services such as behavioural health, dermatology and care for autism beyond rural areas to include more urban sites."

While the findings are encouraging for both patients and healthcare providers, the MU research team notes that further studies should be done to include urban telehealth as well as other types of healthcare organisations utilising video conferencing for clinical appointments.

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