



Title Real-Time (Synchronous) Telehealth in Primary Care: Systematic Review of Systematic Reviews

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Aim

To conduct a systematic review of existing systematic reviews (ie, a meta-review) assessing the impact of real-time telehealth on health outcomes, process of care, resource utilization, and user satisfaction.

Conclusions and results

The results from high-quality reviews indicated that real-time telehealth could be an effective way to improve communication between patients and providers, monitor chronic conditions such as congestive heart failure, and support patients with psychiatric and neurological conditions in remote and under-served communities. Information about cost effectiveness, access to services, resource utilization, process of care, and user satisfaction is lacking. Theoretically, telehomecare could save money by eliminating travel costs and reducing the number of re-admissions to hospital.

Recommendations

With its aging population, vast geographic area, limited healthcare workforce, and rapidly developing telehealth programs, Canada is in a unique position to pave the way for effective and efficient health services that result in equitable, fair, and sustainable healthcare delivery for its citizens. Although weak, the evidence gathered suggests that telehealth could play a role in this process.

Methods

Systematic identification of studies on telehealth modalities published in English in peer-reviewed journals, assessing health outcomes, process of care, resource utilization, and user satisfaction in primary care, yielded 31 publications. Two independent teams of reviewers screened literature, extracted data, and conducted quality assessments. While there was no formal economic analysis, related economic outcomes were extracted from clinical reviews.

Further research/reviews required

Real-time telehealth, with new forms of technology, eg, mobile videoconferencing and multimedia-enabled cellular phones, continues to evolve. Systematic reviews need to be updated regularly to ensure that the knowledge provided is up-to-date and based on new evidence.