



# The fundamentals of telehealth in population health management

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*Comment on:* Kaissar S, Zara S, Fabrice F, *et al.* Physicians' satisfaction with the use of teleconsultation in France. *J Hosp Manag Health Policy* 2023;7:1.

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In this editorial response, we provide a discussion on the fundamentals of teleconsultations in the field of Population Health Management as it relates to Kaissar *et al.* article which explored physicians' satisfaction with the use of teleconsultations in France (1). The authors highlighted the significance of and growing need for telehealth during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic as well as the importance of delivering safe and effective care through teleconsultations. The move from traditional clinical practice to socially distanced digital health, has changed the dynamic of how patients are cared for with acute and chronic healthcare needs (2). Population health management is a care approach that is reliant on collaborative data and interprofessional co-production to manage patients with long-term chronic illnesses within community settings (3). The use of telehealth practices in Population Health Management through teleconsultations is an essential method for delivering continued and collaborative care beyond the clinic room (4), and Kaissar *et al.* emphasized how physicians' rated satisfaction using teleconsultations and its influences for widespread use. According to the data, physicians reported that telemedicine may not be effective for all patients due to concerns with an impact on the doctor-patient relationship and a potential increase in medical errors. Additionally, physicians reported an increased willingness to use telemedicine technologies when involved in its development.

To gain a deeper understanding of physicians'

satisfaction with teleconsultations, Kaissar *et al.* used a descriptive cross-sectional survey to explore physicians' opinions, practice patterns, expectations and predictions of continued use of teleconsultations in future practice. The participating physicians within Toulouse University Hospital were familiar with utilizing this method of delivering care and the COVID-19 pandemic heightening its use. It was evident from the findings that innovative and contemporary ways of delivering healthcare was an influencing factor for physicians' satisfaction. Novel healthcare practices in Population Health Management have been identified as an essential method of reaching populations in vast and rural communities, and the use of telehealth within Kaissar *et al.* study has demonstrated its significance particularly in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (5). Within this study, the authorized use of digital tools to perform teleconsultations was identified to be a significant influencing factor on physicians' perceptions of satisfaction, which supports the idea that telemedicine may not significantly impact the provision of health services and patient care (6), and facilitates integrated care provision when managing the health of a population. Quality assurance was also an influencing factor within the study, ensuring remote care mirrored that of face-to-face consultations and maintaining high-quality health care provision. Collaborative and interprofessional care with the use of digital health technologies and telehealth is a sustainable method for patient decision-making,

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diagnosis of chronic diseases and treatment processes within Population Health Management (7). It is evident from Kaissar *et al.* study that, the benefits of teleconsultations outweigh potential limitations.

With any novel method of delivering healthcare, facing challenges, and overcoming limitations are expected. It was evident that Kaissar *et al.* identified accessibility and technical issues such as sound quality, network coverage and video connection as some of the limitations of teleconsultations. There are evidence-based recommendations that highlight the importance of conducting patient assessments prior to using teleconsultations, as well as evaluating the level of engagement and the assessment of telehealth efficacy for long-term use (8). Digital technology has become widely used in Population Health Management however, recognizing the potential limitations as identified by Kaissar *et al.* encourages the need for further quality assurance processes for telehealth delivery. Telemedicine has been regarded as an essential method for patient review and follow-up (9), but presents challenges for individuals who are not digitally competent, who lack digital skills and whose comprehension of how to use health technologies are diminished by technophobia (10). Although Kaissar *et al.* reported technical issues at 20%, it still serves to underscore the fact that technical issues may arise at any point during a teleconsultation which could occur from the receiver or sender's side of communication.

The Population Health Management approach in caring for people with chronic diseases, has been a care delivery model that has readily accepted and benefited from the integration of telehealth, health telecommunications and digital technology (10). Population Health Management functions as a collaborative, interprofessional and co-productive management strategy for individuals living with long-term chronic illnesses beyond institutional settings (11). Patients with chronic diseases within different population groups have relied on digital health platforms such as teleconsultations as an effective method for obtaining treatment and follow-up and reducing in-person visits to healthcare centers (11). Kaissar *et al.* have highlighted in their study that, the use of teleconsultations is becoming widely adopted by physicians and may enhance traditional healthcare practices in the future. This is a critical finding relevant to the complex care needs of patients within various population groups, much like those presenting with co-morbidities. Promoting self care skills such as self-monitoring of chronic illnesses through the use

of telehealth coaching, has supported behavioral changes that enhance health outcomes (12).

This editorial response has highlighted that teleconsultations are an important care management practice within the field of Population Health Management and Kaissar *et al.* have demonstrated its significance by exploring practitioners' satisfaction with utilizing this service delivery model. The findings illuminate the intricate nature of influencing factors that promote the use of teleconsultations and recognize the limitations of its use. Further studies on this topic are essential to expanding our conceptualization of teleconsultations and fundamental to the advancements in the use of such technology in providing service provisions across communities and population health settings.

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