

Telepsychiatry and Healthcare

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The wealth and abundance of a country can be measured by the quality and number of functioning health facilities that are available. Patient satisfaction is an indicator of good health service delivery and there are many factors that can influence quality delivery.

One of the major issues facing the patient population in the United States is the problem of effective and timely mental health care. The core of this issue is that patients are unable to see a mental health provider in a timely manner to be screened for psychiatric illness, be competently diagnosed and subsequently treated in an evidence-based manner. In a bid to mitigate this issue, the field of telepsychiatry has slowly evolved in the last couple of decades into a system which allows face-to-face quality psychiatric assessment, diagnosis and treatment modalities delivered through electronic mediums, primarily video teleconferencing. This electronic, cost effective mechanism allows access to a mental health provider in a timely manner, enhancing psychiatric care due to early intervention and follow-up, leading to positive outcomes. There is a dire need for mental health providers to be taught the skills required to evaluate patients who are not geographically present in their vicinity due to various circumstances and the optimal ways to assess their mental health conditions. There is a need for clinicians to learn this new and evolving technology and gain expertise to identify underlying emotional issues via technological means and help patients in achieving positive mental health outcomes.

The advent of telepsychiatry occurred in the early 1960s at Dartmouth University, which pioneered a study in which mentally ill patients were evaluated by psychiatric providers via small black and white television screens with poor audio quality.

One of the biggest advantages in using this electronic medium was the fact that patients could be seen relatively soon by a clinician without considering geographical barriers and time constraints

In spite of the positive aspects this technology offers, there are challenges, which need to be overcome, such as difficulty in assessing body language in patients, which is essential in diagnosing individuals for mental health purposes, and this technology does prohibit personal contact with patients (hand on shoulder, etc.), which

enhances greater trust between provider and patient. There have been concerns that utilizing telepsychiatry in institutions where there is not enough clinician training and feedback does lead to lower morale due to less patient interaction Virtual hospitals/wards.