



Telemedicine Use in Adolescent Primary Care

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BACKGROUND

Telemedicine has become an important tool in the medical care of adolescents, especially as virtual interactions became ubiquitous during the COVID-19 pandemic. Providers caring for adolescents in primary care need concise guidance on how to adapt telemedicine effectively for this population.

METHODS

A review of available literature was performed through PubMed, ClinicalKey, and web-based guidelines for pediatric telehealth (American Academy of Pediatrics, Bright Futures, American Telemedicine Association) for articles pertaining to virtual care for well and concern visits for teens. This also included strategies to adapt the visit, including the physical exam, anticipatory guidance, and transitions of care, to the telehealth setting. We compiled tactics for incorporating telemedicine successfully into primary care for teens.

We developed *guidance* for conducting telemedicine visits for the adolescent population. We considered both well visits and concern visits.

Key points include:

Structure telemedicine virtual workflows to ensure high quality, equitable care and maximize team-based care approaches.

Choose an *ideal location* for your workstation, one that is private and quiet.

Confirm consent for medical treatment, either from a parent or from the adolescent, depending on the situation.

Have your patient report their own vital signs with the use of *digital devices* if possible.

Screening questionnaires, such as PHQ-9 and GAD-7, should be used in the same way you would with an in-person visit.

Although there are understandable limitations to a *virtual physical exam*, it is possible to perform one with the help of the patient.

RESULTS

Most adolescent visit types can be fully or mostly performed through telemedicine. However, it is recommended that well care occur in person when feasible. It is imperative that routine immunizations and screening labs continue to be incorporated into virtual visits with the assistance of nursing visits or laboratory orders as indicated.

Telemedicine improves access to healthcare, saves times for patients and caregivers, and encourages social distancing. Many studies have also found high satisfaction with telemedicine among adolescents and their caregivers. Most importantly, telemedicine has been shown to deliver equal or even superior care as compared to in-person visits in certain situations, especially for medical issues which require longitudinal care over multiple follow-up visits.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the increase in the use of telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the potential to improve care accessibility and patient satisfaction, primary care providers must familiarize themselves with how to optimize telemedicine for adolescent care.

EQUITY IN CARE

Continued disparities may exist with telemedicine and patients who identify as BIPOC or lower socioeconomic status.

Pre-appointment check-ins to ensure technology is functioning well are useful for many patients, especially those with lower technology literacy or limited English proficiency. Ensure interpreters are available for this, in addition to the appointment, if needed.

Continue to prioritize one-on-one time with providers over telemedicine for all teens. Offer suggestions to improve privacy for patients (headphone use, yes/no questions, chat functionality, alternative areas to conduct visit from).