

Healthcare Access & Quality: The Role of Telehealth in Rural Healthcare Delivery

Alexandra Guerra, Maggie Carey, Alexis Soave, Anastasia Ibanez, Autumn Espinoza
Department of Allied Health Sciences, Grand Valley State University

INTRO & BACKGROUND

What is telehealth?

- The use of digital information and communication technologies, such as computers and mobile devices, to access health care services remotely and manage health (Mayo Clinic, 2020).

Modes of Telehealth Delivery

- Personal health records, patient portals, and personal health apps (Mayo Clinic, 2020).
- Record vital signs, caloric intake, and physical activity or schedule reminders for medicine.
- Synchronous, asynchronous, and remote monitoring (Mechanic et al., 2020).
- Synchronous: real-time, live discussion to provide medical expertise.
- Asynchronous: patient or physician collects information and sends it to a specialist for diagnostics and treatment expertise.
- Remote monitoring: continuous evaluation of patients' clinical status.
- School-based health centers (Knopf et al., 2016).
- Delivery of vaccination, health assessments, oral health, vision health, substance use, nutrition, and contraceptives. Help utilize mental and behavioral health services.
- Mobile health centers (Seto et al., 2019).
- Units for clinical care and desktop software used for educational and administrative purposes.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The use of technology could reduce referrals, streamline medical evaluations, and decrease the burden of some preventable diseases (Mechanic et al., 2020).

PICO QUESTION

Does increasing use of telehealth improve access to health services in rural areas?

CURRENT TELEHEALTH USE

Fig 1. Telehealth was being used by some hospitals before the pandemic and hospitals have increased its use since (Hong, 2020).

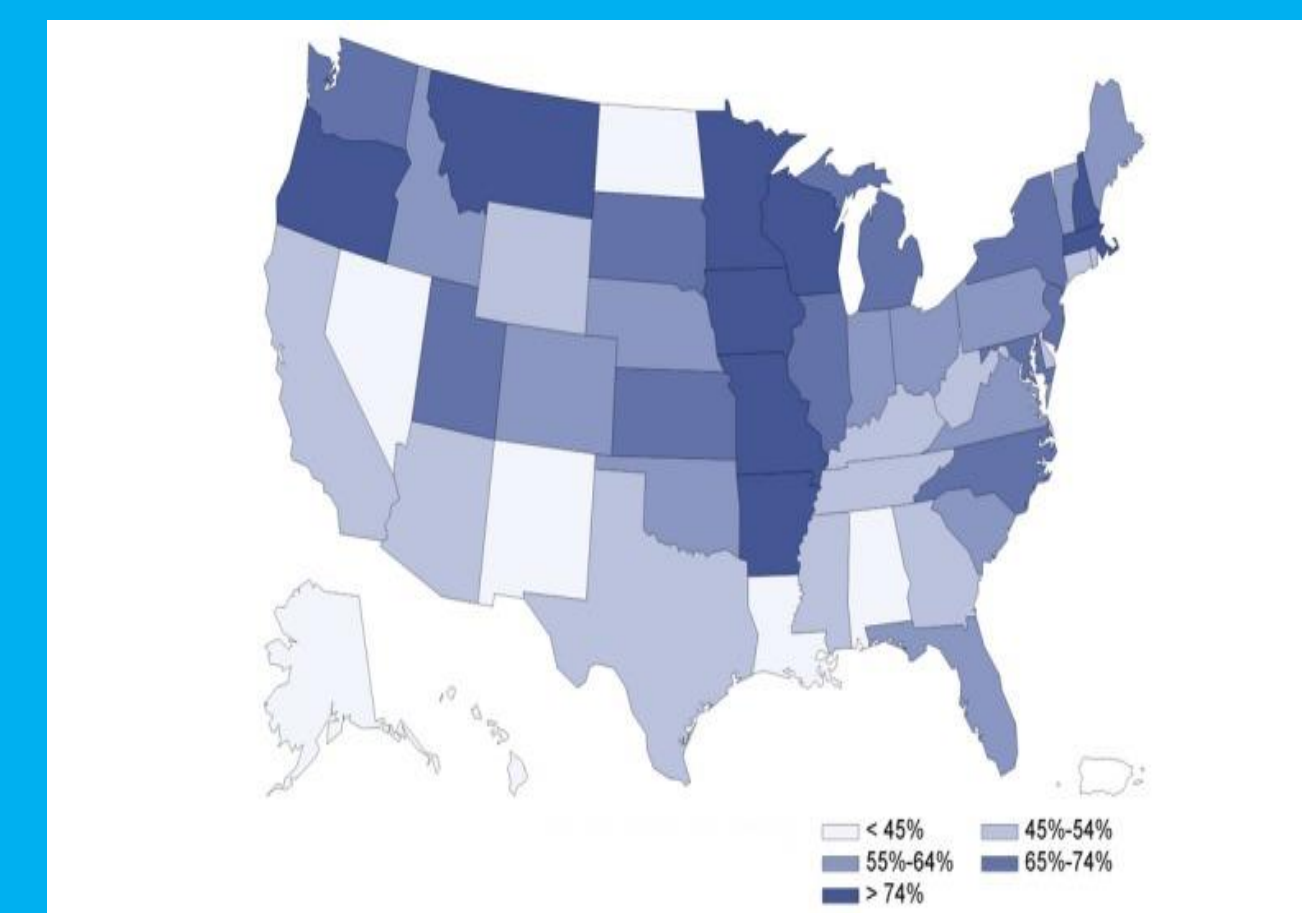
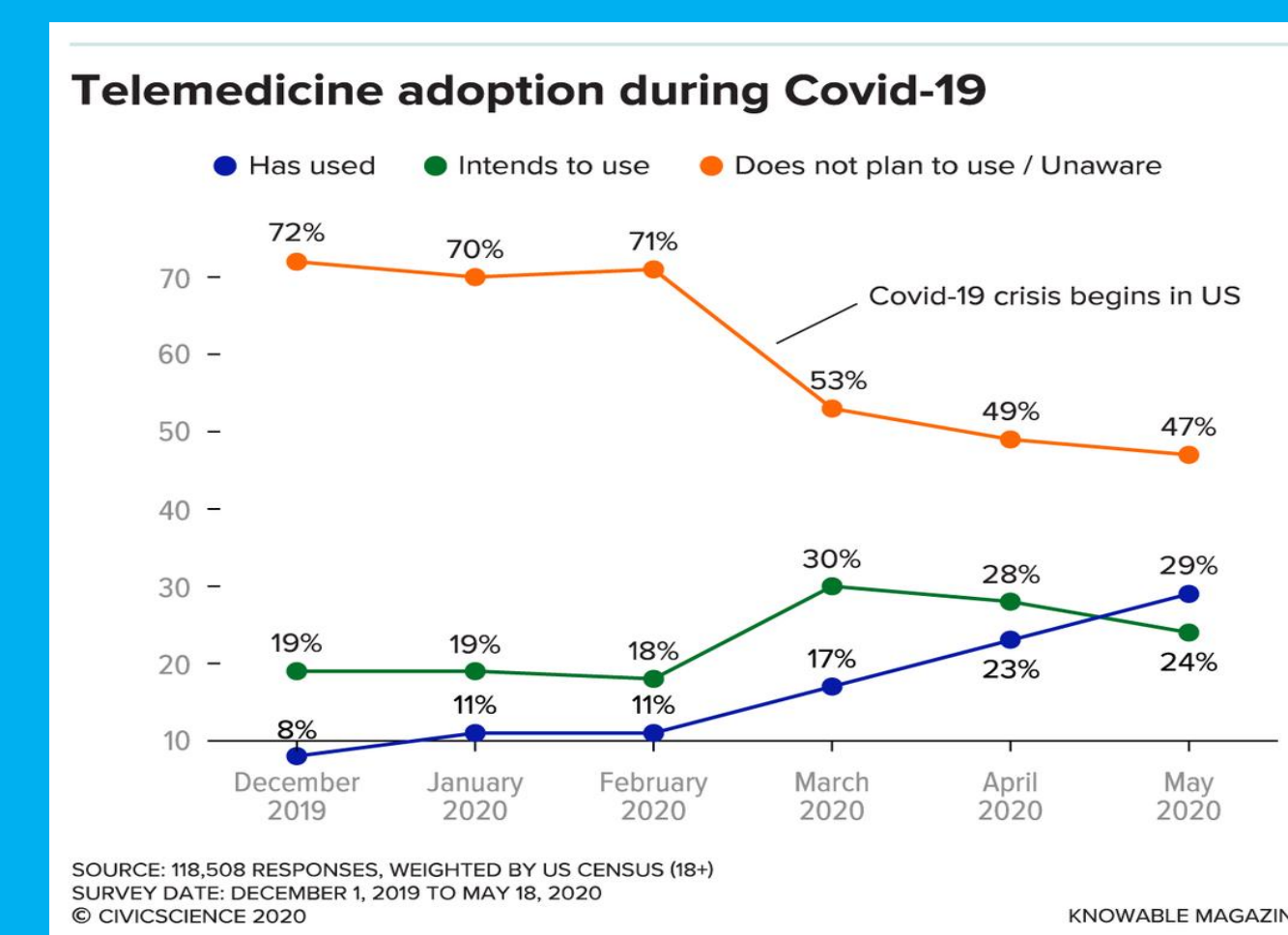


Fig 2. The proportion of hospitals that adopted the telehealth system by US state. The darker the state, the greater number of hospitals that have adopted telehealth (Hong, 2020).

BENEFITS & QUALITY OF CARE

What impact has telehealth had on the quality of patient care?

- Telehealth has reduced the cost of quality health care, making it more accessible to people who may not have been able to afford quality healthcare before (Manocchia, 2020).
- According to a recent J.D. Power study, 6.2% of consumers believe the quality of care was higher than that of an in-person doctor's visit, while 45.1% believe the quality of care is the same (Manocchia, 2020).

What are some benefits of telehealth utilization?

- Improve the triage and coordination of care for patients (Hong, 2020).
- Deliver timely care for the initial screening of symptomatic patients while minimizing exposure in health care facilities, protecting both health providers and patients (Hong, 2020).
- The population's interest in telehealth has increased as COVID-19 numbers have increased (Hong, 2020)
- Patients and providers can access patient portals to manage their health care services at any time (Hong, 2020).

TELEHEALTH IN RURAL AREAS

Why Rural Areas Lack Telehealth

- Mergers within healthcare systems decrease access to regular in-person care (Bagchi, 2019).
- Technological barriers such as limited broadband connectivity in rural areas can make access to telehealth a challenge (Bagchi, 2019).
- The cost of equipment, training, and staffing in rural areas may be a barrier to accessing telehealth. Telehealth is not always part of traditional medical education in medical schools. (Nelson, 2017).

What Telehealth Can Do For Rural Areas

- Telehealth in rural areas increases access to specialty care, preventing patients the cost of traveling to another location (Nelson, 2017).
- Telehealth increases access to care providers to nursing home residents to avoid hospitalization (Nelson, 2017).
- Telehealth can help educate physicians in rural areas (Rhoads, 2016).

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