



Sustaining telehealth services after initial response to COVID-19: Learning from patient and allied health profession experiences

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Aim: To examine patient and staff perspectives of telehealth (specifically videoconferencing) during COVID-19 to inform adoption and sustained use of telehealth within the RBWH Allied Health Professions (AHP) service line.

Methods: Explanatory sequential mixed-methods study design. Surveys were completed by patients (n=109) and clinicians (n=66) across 6 AHP departments. Focus groups with clinicians (n=24) and AO staff (n=13) identified ongoing challenges and opportunities to support sustainable telehealth use.

Results:

- Patients reported an overall positive experience.
- Patient responses to Telehealth Usability Questionnaire indicated high usability towards telehealth platforms.
- 78% of patients would like telehealth to be offered for future AHP appointments.
- Views towards the challenges and opportunities for telehealth were grouped into eight broad constructs.

Technology & physical infrastructure:

- Every clinical space needs to be 'telehealth-ready'
- Consults should be conducted in a private setting with minimal distractions.

Learning how to use the telehealth platform:

- Telehealth platform was easy to use.
- Training should be provided to all staff.
- Training is best if it is 'just in time' and interactive.

Patient selection & engagement:

- Can enable more active participation.
- Can be harder to engage & build relationships
- Patients' physical environment can impact consult

Who's starting the conversation?

- Largely defaulted back to offering in-person.
- It's up to the clinician to decide if a patient should receive telehealth
- When patients request telehealth to AOs, it needs to be checked with clinician before proceeding.

What are people saying about telehealth?

Acceptance of telehealth as valid service delivery model:

- Telehealth is not suitable for every patient.
- Preference for initial assessments to be completed in-person.
- Telehealth is (clinically) better than telephone.
- Hands-on practice is a big part of professional identity.

Technology connections & support:

- Technical issues are ongoing
- Impacts the effectiveness of the consult
- Lack of confidence in troubleshooting technical issues.
- On-demand technical support for both staff & patients would be helpful.

Administrative staff support:

- Staff levels need to support service demands.
- Designated staff means tasks are more likely to be completed.
- Adequate AO support directly influences decisions to offer telehealth to patients.

Ability to adapt clinical interventions:

- Dependent on the task.
- It is up to clinicians to adapt tasks which they don't feel confident in doing.
- Time and support from clinical peers is required.

