

## Providers Expectations on Telemedicine: A Qualitative Research in a Large Healthcare Network of Latin America

Giussi Bordoni MV, Plazzotta F, Sommer J, Benítez S, García G, Luna D, González B De Quirós F

Health Informatics Department, Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires

### Abstract

*The benefits of Telemedicine make it a viable, reliable and useful discipline for dispensing health care. This qualitative study is aimed to understand the expectations, opinions and previous knowledge of the professionals about telemedicine at the Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires. Results: Professionals realize that Telemedicine is inserted into their usual practice in an informal way. They consider telemedicine as an alternative to the traditional delivery of health care, but are afraid of their role in health care is undermined. Professionals point out very specific applications of Telemedicine such as monitoring the health of patients remotely, drug doses adjustments and sharing clinical information. Conclusion: Results suggest that professionals are not familiar with telemedicine and will be necessary to develop a training plan before implementation.*

### Keywords:

Telemedicine, Telehealth, Qualitative Research.

### Introduction

Healthcare system of Argentina is highly segmented, inequitable and heterogeneous. Three important challenges are, get better access to services, increase the quality of care, and lower the costs. Healthcare Information Technologies comprises a set of tools that offer an opportunity to overcome the challenges and Telemedicine is postulated as a viable, reliable and useful discipline. Several studies have attempted to collect data about healthcare professionals' expectations and opinions on telemedicine. Evidence found is controversial, although most of them report that available technologies are acceptable and easy to integrate, they believe it's necessary to establish improvements to make them more reliable and adaptable to users' workflow.

Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires is planning to develop a new healthcare model based on telemedicine using the Electronic Health Record and the Personal Health record. The aim of this study is to understand healthcare professionals' expectations, opinions and prior knowledge about telemedicine as part of the project's first stage.

### Methods

A qualitative study based on in-depth interviews and focus groups was conducted in November and December of 2014. Content analysis was performed using Grounded Theory and NVIVO.

### Results

Twenty five professionals (medical and non-medical) participated in 5 in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups.

Participants' specialties were Family Medicine, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Psychology, Nursing, Internal Medicine, Surgery, Dermatology, Nutrition and Lactation. Participants agreed that "Telemedicine" is a form of remote communication:

*"I guess its medicine in the world of telecommunications where television and Internet are essential in everyone's life".*

Professionals identified phone, email and Skype as tools used to communicate remotely with colleagues or patients:

*"I had remote-live-supervisions using Skype, since the other therapist lived far away".*

*"Sometimes I give medical counseling to patients using Skype, I find it very useful".*

Different opinions were emerging referring to the physician-patient relationship, the role of the institution, and the perception they have about this healthcare modality. They report that it's important to have a previous relationship with the patient before using telemedicine:

*"It's useful with patients that I already know because a previous relationship has been established".*

Professionals are concerned about the use that patients make of these tools and are afraid of losing professionalism in the doctor-patient relationship:

*"Patients use the email to medical consultations and for request to an appointment. Others use "Whatsapp" and this is not formal".*

Professionals are also concerned about the role of the institution regarding the regulation of these new practices:

*"Patients have no limits: call you late at night for small queries and not for actual emergencies. The institution has the role to create norms and procedures on how to handle these communication devices".*

At the chance of using Telemedicine at their daily workflow they foresee communication with other professionals or education contexts. They said Telemedicine is not useful if the reason for consultation required physical examination:

*"I think it's a useful tool for people who live far away, but if you have to touch the patient is not helpful".*

### Conclusions

Results suggest that professionals were not familiar with this kind of healthcare delivery. They found difficult to imagine how telemedicine would be implemented into their daily workflow. For future implementation, it will be necessary to design a training plan for health care professionals and change management strategies.

### Address for correspondence

Dr. Giussi Bordoni Maria Victoria  
maria.giussi@hospitalitaliano.org.ar