

Teledentistry–An Alternative Dental Service

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Editorial

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Editorial

The aim of this editorial is to recommend an alternative method to deliver dental services by using digital technology which is called 'Teledentistry'. It is not a specialty. There are a lot of innovative technologies evolved in recent years. By using digital technology and telecommunication, teledentistry can be used to apply dental informatics in dental practice to directly affect the delivery of oral healthcare. Teledentistry is a subspecialist field of telemedicine which links dental providers and their patients through digitization. Teledentistry is a combination of telecommunications and dentistry involving the exchange of clinical information and images over remote distances for dental consultation and treatment planning [1]. It is cost effective as well as it eliminates disparities between rural and urban areas by providing effective oral healthcare.

The term "Teledentistry" was first used in 1997, when Cook defined it as "... the practice of using videoconferencing technologies to diagnose and provide advice about treatment over a distance [2]". There are various measures that can be used to implement teledentistry. The dental professional should be experienced and should have knowledge to use electronic devices, must be registered in the state where they are working and must be able to protect patient privacy and confidentiality. Teledentistry is the use of computers and modern day technologies for the diagnosis and treatment of dental problems. Earlier, diagnostic images were recorded and stored on film still in practice at many places. Likewise, patient records are written on paper and stored in files or computers, which are a very long and tedious job. However, this longstanding problem is effectively solved by the practice of digitalization [3].

Teleconsultation through teledentistry can take place in either of the following ways – "Real-Time Consultation" and "Store-and Forward Method" [4]. Real-Time Consultation involves a videoconference in which dental professionals and their patients, at different locations, may see, hear, and communicate with one another. Store-and-Forward Method involves the exchange of clinical information and static images collected and stored by the dental practitioner, who forwards them for consultation and treatment planning. A third method has also been described, known as "Remote Monitoring Method", in which patients are monitored at a distance and can either be hospital-based or home-based [5].

The practitioners of teledentistry should take utmost care to ensure that patient privacy is not compromised by unauthorized entities. However, patients should be made aware that their information is to be transmitted electronically and the possibility exists that the information will be intercepted, despite maximum efforts to maintain security [6].

Kopycka-Kedzierawski DT, et al. [7] suggested that teledentistry offers a potentially efficient means of screening high-risk preschool children for signs of early childhood caries [6]. The use of teledentistry for screening of oral diseases to determine prevalence and treatment needs, and provide access to specialists for consultations, is promising. Oral diseases impact health and quality of life for many. Expanding the roles of dental hygienists and removing practice restrictions would increase the number of oral care providers who could perform screenings, care and referrals using teledentistry [8].

Teledentistry, also known as telemedicine in dentistry, will be included in the ADA's Code on Dental Procedures and Nomenclature (CDT Code) for the first time in 2018 [9]. The ADA House of Delegates passed Resolution 45H-2015, Comprehensive ADA Policy Statement on teledentistry, in November at ADA 2015 - America's Dental Meeting. "The policy states that if any allied dental personnel are participating in teledentistry, their supervision should conform to the dental practice act in the state where the patient is receiving services and where the dentist is licensed".

Even though teledentistry links dental providers and their patients, dental colleges can also support and provide teledentistry consultations to remote areas using digital infrastructure. A clear understanding, dentist and patient satisfaction remain an important factor in the future for effective implementation of teledentistry to access dental care for both rural and urban communities. Further evidence based studies are required to evaluate the clinical outcomes and cost effectiveness so that it will be a promising path in the near future.

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