

Considerations for a Sustainable Podiatric Telemedicine Service

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Abstract. Presently telemedicine in podiatry is in its nascent development phase. Current exploratory work indicates that a comprehensive set of guidelines regarding telemedicine in podiatry is necessary. Stakeholders have put forward multiple factors to be considered while developing guidelines to devise a sustainable service.

Keywords. Telemedicine, foot care, sustainability

1. Introduction

The increasing demands of evolving health requirements, rising societal standards, and the pursuit of more ambitious health objectives are compelling health systems to enhance their capacity to deliver superior health outcomes and increased social benefits to follow Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [1]. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, telemedicine has been extensively embraced as a means of providing a multitude of remote consultations on a global scale. The existing literature indicates a dearth of research on telemedicine for podiatry, with a deficiency in established guidelines for telemedicine consultations with patients seeking podiatric care [2]. Hence, the objective is to explore and present an array of factors that are suggested to be taken into consideration during the developmental phase to help ensure the sustainability of the service.

2. Method

The study involved three semi-structured online focus groups with service users, podiatrists, and senior management. These focus groups formed part of a Delphi study to develop a podiatric telemedicine guideline for core podiatry in primary care settings. Sixteen participants participated, with one of the questions asking participants, "What would you consider necessary to ensure that the service is sustainable?" All participants identities were pseudonymised before the data were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

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The necessary ethical approval from the University of Malta Faculty Research Ethics Committee and consent from participants were obtained prior to the commencement of the study. Thematic analysis of the responses to this particular inquiry was conducted.

3. Results

Although it was always the initial assumption of the participants that older adults might find it challenging to implement telemedicine due to the involvement of information technology (IT), focus group discussions revealed that what matters is the individuals' IT literacy, willingness, and the possibility of adopting new approaches to care delivery. Although results from these focus groups cannot be generalized, they provide stakeholder insights that are recommended for consideration in the development phase of a podiatric telemedicine service as highlighted in Figure 1.

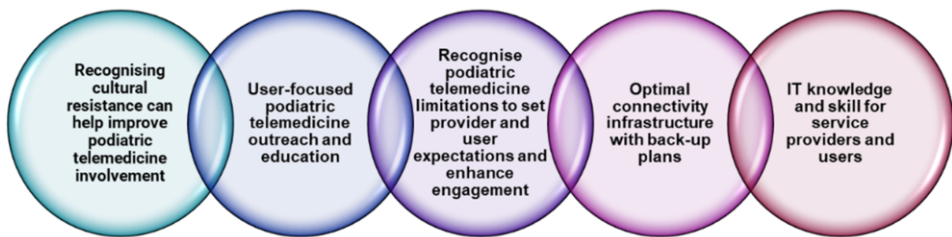


Figure 1. Stakeholders' considerations for a sustainable podiatric telemedicine service.

4. Discussion

This exploratory work suggests the development of a comprehensive podiatric telemedicine guideline based on substantial evidence, as recommended in a recent scoping review [2]. Therefore, stakeholders' insights during these focus groups must be considered and not disregarded. The present scenario offers a chance to incorporate these factors into the developmental phase of the podiatric telemedicine guideline. Acknowledging the potential obstacles and addressing service limitations are imperative to establish realistic expectations among the populace and overcome cultural resistance to help ensure a more sustainable service.

References

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