Telehealth Experience at a Federally Qualified Health Center in Los Angeles

David Solomon, MD
Venice Family Clinic
Pre-Covid-19 Pandemic

• Providing some services via telehealth
  • DM care team
  • Limited visits for Hep C
  • Health ed

• Barriers
  • Lack of reimbursement
March 2020

• Telephone visits
• Video visits (approx May 2020)
• Started video groups on Zoom for MAT/buprenorphine-naloxone in Sept
• Patients experiencing homelessness
  • Some in-person outside
  • Telephonic appointments
Successes of Telehealth

• For patients (underserved, PEH, people with substance dependence)
  • Ease of access
  • Gas money
  • Avoiding public transit

• For clinicians
  • Flexibility = more access
  • Efficiency = more access
  • Improved geographic reach
Communication

• Equivalent to in-person for most visits.
  • Exception- difficult diagnoses such as giving a cancer diagnosis or MSK or neurologic conditions

• Patient perspective
  • Most patients appear to appreciate a combo of in-person and telehealth
  • Helpful for elderly patients and those with mobility issues
  • Productivity/freedom during the "wait time"
Challenges

• Patients not wanting to come in
• Video visits - more challenges than successes
  • What do they add?
• Evaluation of derm conditions
• Fewer lab draws
• "The physical exam is important when it's important" - Yogi Berra?
Clinic adaptations

• Home BP monitors
• Lab draws without clinic visits
• Medication delivery: Project Room Key
MAT before March 2020: Summit Program

- Frequency of appointments: weekly to monthly
- In-person group visits (60% show rate): 12 people scheduled, 8 show up
  - Social support
  - Community
  - Peer to peer teaching
MAT After March 2020

• Video Group visits: demand (access, interest) has been lower
  • 8 scheduled, 4 show up
• Telephone visits and telephone counseling
• Telephone case management
• Visit frequency with clinicians roughly the same
• Fewer urine toxicology screens, difficult to monitor adherence
Figure 18. Age-Adjusted Accidental Drug Overdose Death Rate (per 100K population) by SPA, Jan 2019 - July 2020

Note: *The majority of monthly death counts used to calculate age-adjusted rates were 20 or less and statistically unstable. Rate should be interpreted with caution.

LA County Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Jan 2021
People experiencing homelessness

- Limited video access
- Obama phones

Primary Care No Show Rates – PEH (excludes group and outreach)

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Lessons Learned

• Phone visits are superior to video visits
  • Simplicity
  • Psychology
  • Access for all (PEH)

• It's harder to establish community in group video visits but it is possible

• Much chronic disease management can be done over the phone
• Telephone visits increase access
  • "Wait Doc, let me pull over"