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Assessment of Telemedicine Coverage and Factors Affecting its Utilization among Medical Practitioners in India

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Introduction

Telemedicine, conventionally defined as remote healing, encompasses health care delivery, education, research, health surveillance, and public health promotion. Cell phone and internet use have become practically universal as wireless broadband technology evolves. India's 12-week curfew during the COVID-19 outbreak limited access to healthcare. Consequently, India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare established the first telemedicine guidelines. However, the views of Indian medical practitioners around the use of telemedicine need to be captured for effective implementation.

Objective

The primary objective is to determine the proportion of Indian doctors using telemedicine. The secondary objective is to study the feasibility and factors affecting telemedicine use in India from the medical practitioners' perspective.

Method

This research used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. A probability proportionate to the population sampling was done (openEpi) for 384 doctors at cluster level distribution across India to gather the quantitative data.

For a deeper understanding of the feasibility and factors affecting the use of telemedicine, in-depth interviews were done with 30 doctors across the country using purposive sampling. Data will be analyzed using RStudio.

Result

As per the pilot study of 35 doctors, 57.16% use some form of telemedicine in their practice. The data collection for the main phase of the study shall end by 15 June 2022. The analysis shall be presented following the completion of the data collection phase. The transcripts are also under the analysis phase.

Conclusion

Our interim analysis concludes that telemedicine can make healthcare more accessible and egalitarian in India. Guidelines must be expanded to address concerns around limited internet access, weak telecom infrastructure, widespread adoption of telemedicine and the need to rapidly train the Indian doctors in telemedicine. Addressing these challenges can make telemedicine equitable.

Key Words

Telemedicine, medical practitioners, healthcare

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