

Synchronous Teledentistry: Impact on and Access to Pediatric Care

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Objectives

Teledentistry is a care modality suggested to enhance access to dental care for vulnerable children, but few studies have evaluated the impact of teledentistry on access to dental care. This study examined the impact of new patient synchronous teledentistry visits for children referred to a university dental setting and assessed whether having a new patient teledentistry visit improves access to care compared to referred patients seen only via in-person visits.

Methods

A retrospective chart review was conducted for new patients in the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at The University of Iowa between July 1st, 2020, and May 31st, 2021. Treatment completion was compared between subjects seen in-person and those seen via teledentistry. Bivariate analysis examined treatment completion rates among patients seen via teledentistry and in-person.

Results

Out of approximately 1,288 total patients who were referred to the pediatric dentistry clinic during the study time frame, approximately 63 had a new patient teledentistry visit. There was no significant difference for treatment completion rates among patients seen via teledentistry (n= 63) and in-person (n= 57) (p=0.44). Preliminary results suggest that teledentistry is a viable means of facilitating new patient visits for pediatric patients.

Conclusion

The rates of treatment plan completion were similar among children seen for a new patient exam via teledentistry or in-person. The preliminary findings provide a favorable insight on the impact of teledentistry on access to dental care for vulnerable pediatric patients, and teledentistry may effectively supplement in-person exams. Further analyses are needed to fully compare outcomes of those with teledentistry visits vs. traditional visits.