June 2022

Perspectives on Telemedicine from a National Study of Youth in the United States

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Abstract

Introduction: Telemedicine is increasingly popular with the recent surge in use due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite youth status as “tech natives,” limited data are available on their perspectives on telemedicine. Our study seeks to understand youth telemedicine knowledge, prior experiences, preferences for use, and the impact of COVID-19 on these perspectives. Methods: Participants in MyVoice, a national text message cohort of U.S. youth age 14-24, were sent five open-ended questions in October 2019 and October 2020. A codebook was iteratively developed by using inductive analysis. Responses were independently coded by two investigators, with discrepancies resolved by discussion or a third investigator. Results: Sixty-five percent (836/1,283) and 77% (887/1,129) of participants responded to at least 1 question in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Most youth reported awareness of telemedicine and although many have not used it, COVID-19 has increased use. Further, many are willing to try telemedicine services. Most youth noted a preference for video rather than phone visits, but they believe both to be less effective than in person. Youth also reported varied preferences on services best suited for telemedicine, with COVID-19 positively impacting their views. Discussion: Youth are aware of and willing to use telemedicine services, with many reporting use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth are willing to accept a wide variety of telemedicine services, though they still desire in-person options. Health systems and clinics should offer a wide range of services via telemedicine to fit the varying needs of youth both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19; telehealth; telemedicine; youth.