TITLE: Comparing residents’ communication and interpersonal skills between telemedicine and face-to-face encounters

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SUBMISSION ROLE: Research and Innovation Abstracts

PRESENTATION TYPE: Oral or Poster

CURRENT CATEGORY: Research

ABSTRACT BODY:

Short Description: In the era of increasing telemedicine use, our aim was to compare communication skills of residents in telemedicine compared with face-to-face standardized patient encounters. We found residents perform significantly lower in developing rapport and shared decision-making in telemedicine. In telemedicine encounters with a second provider, residents used more medical jargon and did not close the encounter as well. Our findings suggest further communication training is needed for physicians in telemedicine.

Abstract: Purpose
Telemedicine has become a bridge to healthcare access for rural communities and underserved populations. Our aim was to compare the communication skills of residents in the context of telemedicine and non-telemedicine visits during standardized patient (SP) encounters.

Methods
Internal medicine (n=113) and pediatric (n=53) residents at the University of Illinois at Chicago participated in telemedicine SP encounters as part of a communications Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) during 2013–2015. Two telemedicine cases were developed: a) a medical error is discussed with a prisoner, and b) a rural nurse practitioner asks for possible transfer of a young female patient with abdominal pain. Each station in the communications OSCE included a ten-minute encounter, followed by a ten-minute debriefing. SPs completed case-specific checklists as well as the Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS) scale. Residents completed an online questionnaire.

Results
Residents performed significantly lower in telemedicine encounters, when compared to non-telemedicine encounters. The pooled mean CIS score for IM residents in the telemedicine encounters was 68.17% (SD=5.64), compared to 72.40% (SD=8.99) in non-telemedicine encounters, P < 0.001. The pooled mean CIS for the pediatric residents was 59.70% (SD=12.62) for telemedicine encounters, and 70.92% (SD=7.38) for live encounters, P < 0.001. Performance was significantly lower for items that demonstrated rapport with the patient (interest in me as a person), confidentiality (discussion of sensitive subject matters), and shared-decision making (discussion of options and plans). Furthermore, telemedicine encounters with a second healthcare provider led residents to use less appropriate vocabulary and do less to close the encounter.

Discussion
While residents communicated effectively and established rapport in challenging non-telemedicine encounters, they performed significantly lower on telemedicine cases and on specific CIS items. Telemedicine is an increasingly available modality and promotes access to healthcare. However, physicians need further training to allow shared-decision making practices in telemedicine.

Level of Audience: Early-career

Focus of Presentation: GME


Liu X et al. Doctor-Patient Communication: A Comparison between Telemedicine consultation and face-to-face
Yudkowsky R et al. Assessing residents’ telehealth communication skills using standardized patients. Medical Education 2011; 45: 1131-1162.

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