

2021

Telemedicine: A viable option in times of COVID-19?

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Recommended Citation

Ticona Tiña, Dayana (2021) "Telemedicine: A viable option in times of COVID-19," *Revista de la Facultad de Medicina Humana*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 , Article 27.

Available at: <http://inicib.urp.edu.pe/rfmh/vol21/iss2/27>

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TELEMEDICINE: A VIABLE OPTION IN TIMES OF COVID-19?

TELEMEDICINA: ¿UNA OPCIÓN VIABLE EN TIEMPOS DE COVID-19?

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Mr. Editor

We have read with great interest the article "A new coronavirus, a new disease: COVID-19" by Pareja, et. al. where we observe that the repercussions bringing with pandemic, evidence the limited experience we have⁽¹⁾. Telemedicine (TM) has become a technological tool to provide medical care and a tool with great potential in settings where the infrastructure is intact and doctors are available for care⁽²⁾. In this way, exposure is minimized, taking into account that number of infections occurred in hospitals was gargantuan⁽¹⁾.

Even before the arrival of COVID-19, in several countries and especially in the United States, TM was used to bring palliative care to the homes of patients with chronic and stable diseases⁽³⁾, associated with high satisfaction of patients and medical staff⁽⁴⁾. Due to the current state of emergency, they are an essential tool to support the clinical needs of the health system⁽⁵⁾. There is a willingness of patients to use TM, however, there are still barriers as well as the lack of digital literacy and the unwillingness of doctors to adopt TM, as seen in Australia⁽⁶⁾.

TM allows an exhaustive medical history to be carried out, but it also has limitations such as physical examination and auxiliary exams⁽⁷⁾. Physician must have the judgment to determinate who needs swab testing, prioritizing the risk population. However, most countries lack a regulatory framework to authorize, integrate and reimburse telemedicine services, even in emergency situations⁽⁸⁾.

Peru has not implemented a strategy or operational plan to guide its service providers to change the system such as teleconsultations, nor a data exchange mechanism with decentralized epidemiological surveillance.

COVID-19 is a call to adopt gradual changes in the TM implementation in our country, since it shows an important utility in cases of disasters and emergencies. This challenge must be addressed and collaborated to promote its safe and evidence-based use.

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Cite as: Kevin Flores-Lovon, Dayana Ticona. Telemedicine: A viable option in times of COVID-19?. Rev. Fac. Med. Hum. April 2021; 21(2):459-460. DOI 10.25176/RFMH.v21i2.2947

Journal home page: <http://revistas.urp.edu.pe/index.php/RFMH>

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Authorship contributions: The authors participated in the genesis of the idea, project design, data collection and interpretation, analysis of results and preparation of the manuscript of this research work.

Financing: Self-financed.

Interest conflict: The authors declare that they have

no conflicts of interest in the publication of this article.

Received: April 13, 2020

Approved: February 19, 2021

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Revista de la Facultad de Medicina Humana
INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIONES EN CIENCIAS BIOMEDICAS
Vol. 21 N° 2
Año 2021