



LETTERS

VIDEO CONSULTATIONS FOR COVID-19

Video consultations for triage of patients with covid-19

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Greenhalgh and colleagues discuss the potential use of video consultations for covid-19 and outline some of the system level challenges for implementation and scale-up.¹ Despite the limited evidence, video consultations are widely used in resource limited settings with robust telecommunication networks and a large number of citizens who use smartphones.

In India, for example, there are several health start-ups offering video consultations, primarily as a triage tool providing medical advice and guidance on referral. Most of these video consultations and referrals are external to the public health system; nearly 70% of healthcare in India is provided by the private sector.² Testing for covid-19 is currently only available at designated government laboratories. In a fragmented health system, video consultations could be the first line of contact between a person with suspected covid-19 and the health system. Video consultation platforms could be mandated to trigger notifications on potential cases that need further evaluation and confirmatory testing for covid-19. This would help strengthen the national disease surveillance network.

Healthcare facilities are likely to be overwhelmed with seriously ill patients in forthcoming days, so video consultation platforms would serve a complementary role. Embedding machine learning algorithms into the video consultation platform could facilitate

the automation of triage, particularly for responding to queries and identifying those at risk using a symptom checklist and interactive voice interface that uses natural language processing capabilities.³ A potential model of remote home monitoring using video consultations and remote virtual presence has been described for chronic conditions such as end stage kidney disease.⁴ Covid-19 offers an unprecedented opportunity to augment the capacity of health systems using these digital health tools.

Competing interests: OJ is secretary of Asia Pacific Association for Medical Informatics and leads strategic engagement for the Digital Health India Association, a non-profit agency that engages with ministries of health to progress the digital health agenda towards the sustainable development goals.

- 1 Greenhalgh T, Wherton J, Shaw S, Morrison C. Video consultations for covid-19. *BMJ* 2020;368:m998. 10.1136/bmj.m998 32165352
- 2 International Institute for Population Sciences. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4). 2015-16: India. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR339/FR339.pdf>
- 3 Kuziemyk C, Maeder AJ, John O, et al. Role of artificial intelligence within the telehealth domain. *Yearb Med Inform* 2019;28:35-40. 10.1055/s-0039-1677897 31022750
- 4 John O, Jha V. Remote patient management in peritoneal dialysis: an answer to an unmet clinical need. In: *Remote patient management in peritoneal dialysis*. Vol 197. Karger Publishers, 2019: 99-112, 10.1159/000496305.

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