

Patient Preference for Tele-Behavioral Health Appointments during and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Alyson Gwaltney, Pharm.D. Candidate 2021, Kara Hoehn, Pharm.D. Candidate 2021
Kelly Gable, Pharm.D., BCPP, Jaron Asher, MD.
Family Care Health Center (St. Louis, MO)

Abstract.

COVID-19, a worldwide pandemic starting in early 2020, made it difficult for healthcare providers to offer adequate care to their patients. Disease prevention strategies included social distancing, masks, and home quarantine. The pandemic has prohibited some patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses from receiving proper care, and providers have attempted to mitigate barriers from the pandemic by offering telehealth appointments. Patients receiving behavioral health care may not be comfortable with using telehealth platforms to meet with their provider. It is important to determine how to best provide care to patients and ensure they have access to mental health services. This study used surveys to determine appointment preference, reason for preference, and barriers to receiving care associated with each type of appointment.

Participants were those actively receiving care from Family Care Health Center in Missouri within the last 6 months. Over five weeks, an 8-question telephone survey was administered to 60 patients aged 18 to 60 years of age. Half of the participants surveyed preferred a hybrid, incorporating both in-person and telehealth, for future behavioral health appointments. Convenience and saving gas money/travel time were the most common reasons for preferring a hybrid method among patients. Approximately 40% of participants preferred complete telehealth visits for reasons such as being comfortable in their own home and saving gas money/travel time. Seven patients preferred complete in-person appointments due to human connection with their provider with this method. The most commonly reported barriers to in-person appointments included transportation and fear of COVID-19 exposure. Barriers to telehealth appointments included a need for in-person connection, lack of reliable internet connection, and privacy concerns. Overall, the results of this study will help establish a more patient-care centered approach when serving those with behavioral health concerns at the clinic.