



Telepharmacy Approach in Implementing Social Distancing System During Covid-19 Scenario

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ABSTRACT

Disasters and pandemics raise distinctive challenges to healthcare system. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is swiftly spreading worldwide which is leading to the increased risk of morbidity and mortality. Telepharmacy and telehealth service serve as a modern approach to seek new opportunities to improve patient care particularly effective during epidemic outbursts when implementing social distance systems is recommend by health authorities such as World Health Organization (WHO). It served as a contemporary approach for the healthcare providers to deliver pharmaceutical services through telecommunications technology in distant populations as well as to allow pharmacist and patients to connect via using smartphones or webcam to seek information regarding medication dispensing, patients counseling, and prescription verification. It is a fruitful and proactive way to provide a variety of benefits to patients seeking healthcare services. Telepharmacy will be a great boon for a country like India with very huge population, where people from remote areas retail cannot reach to a pharmacy, now can order and buy medicines, protective equipment's like masks, gloves and face shields through online pharmacy. It will help to avoid direct contact between the pharmacist and costumers that will be beneficial in reducing the chances of community spread of COVID-19 and will promote social distancing concept among the people.

Keywords: Covid-19, Telepharmacy services, Telecommunication, Patient management, Pharmaceutical care.

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INTRODUCTION

March 11, 2020 World Health Organization (WHO), declared COVID-19 a pandemic as well as has called for governments to take “immediate and aggressive action” to alter the course of the outburst¹. Tele-pharmacy and telehealth service are particularly effective during these epidemic outbursts when implementing social distance systems is recommend by healthcare authorities. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is triggered by SARS-COV2, it is a respiratory virus, which leads to chronic lung infection such as asthma, disruptive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, chronic renal and chronic liver disease, immuno-compromised condition, neurologic disorder causing death in patient suffering from COVID-19 disease. Therefore, it signifies the causative agent of a deadly disease that is of worldwide concern of the public health².

Telepharmacy is a technology that provides an innovative way to deliver pharmaceutical service such as dispensing of medicines, counseling of patients and verification of the

prescriptions by a competent pharmacist in order to serve their patients³.

The delivery of pharmaceutical care without exposing risks of pharmacist to the visitors and staff by using telecommunication will help to avoid direct contact between the pharmacist and costumers will definitely be beneficial in reducing the chances of community spread of COVID-19 and will promote social distancing concept. Through this way, patients can receive their medicines and other pharmaceutical care items easily at their homes.

In 20th century, telecommunication technologies such as a computer, phone, etc., has expanded worldwide rapidly which influences healthcare delivery system in many countries. The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy describes “telepharmacy” as “the delivery of pharmacy service by registered pharmacist by using information provided by telecommunication to the customer located at a far distance”⁴.

The patients can receive advice regarding self-protection form the COVID-19 infection, consultation in order to maintain healthy diet and medication instructions and different ways to improve health care by the qualified pharmacist. Pharmacist plays a vital role in the pharmaceutical amenities' delivery. Through telepharmacy techniques pharmacist provides patients with high quality of care in particular areas such as monitoring of medicine, delivery of drug and its information, dispensing of medicine, and counseling. Programs offered by telepharmacy provides access to



pharmaceutical care with 24-hours door-to-door delivery services. In the current scenario, the situation continues raise as well as to develop over each day passing, community pharmacists provides communication toolkit regarding COVID-19 for the welfare and the safety of the public ⁵.

As the continues universal blowout of COVID-19, precautions are advised by WHO to protect oneself and others from the virus transmission such as washings of hands with sanitizer or soap, avoid going in public, maintain 1-meter distance in public, maintain respiratory hygiene, stay at home and isolate oneself if facing slight signs of viral fever.

Hence, telepharmacy visit can virtually provide with higher-level medical support. We hope that COVID-19 vaccines will pass in all phases of clinical trials and will be available soon in the market. Though, telepharmacy will not solve the health issues completely but it's well suited as a solution insight of current scenarios in which pharmacists and the healthcare providers are available to ensure patients with the care, they need during COVID-19 pandemic ⁶.

Under Utilization of Hospital Pharmacy

The pharmacy profession is still lagging in developing countries as compared with developed countries although hospital pharmacists are well-known for their importance as health care providers in many developed countries, in most developing countries it is still underutilized or underestimated ⁷.

Knowledge and kindness of pharmacists were recognized as two major factors that could not only fulfill and but also encourages a willingness to pay for the service. They can individualize the medications and their dosing according to the needs of the patient, which can minimize the cost of care for the medication.

Prospect of Pharmacists in Patient Management Service and Telehealth Care

At present, Telepharmacy and telehealth technologies are especially effective during epidemic outbreaks, when health authorities recommend implementing social distance systems. The country has a huge opportunity to recruit these pharmacists at Telehealth Care in the COVID-19 scenario. Telephone-based measures improve efficiency by linking appropriate information and feedback. In addition to increasing access to healthcare, telepharmacy is a fruitful and proactive way to provide a variety of benefits to patients seeking healthcare; diagnose and monitor critical and chronic health conditions; improve healthcare quality and reduce costs. In each call, a pharmacist can provide both appropriate and quality information from the most recent medical systems. Studies show that the lack of proper medication management leads to higher healthcare costs, longer hospital stays, morbidity and mortality. A pharmacist can

play a role in both medical aids and regulation in healthcare management ⁸.

Advantage of Tele-pharmacy in the Covid-19 Epidemic

Telepharmacy not only guarantees to provide medicines but also ensures patients satisfaction via telehealth by providing patients counseling in order to avoid direct contact with each other, keeping in mind the health safety of the pharmacists and costumers in COVID-19 epidemic. The telecommunication technologies have expanded worldwide, which is providing healthcare delivery in many countries ⁹.

The latest technologies like automated dispensing cabinets besides electronic health information systems in order to look at medication orders have emerged at the hospitals that provides 24-hour pharmacy service to the patients. The telepharmacy service provides reviews of medicine before obtaining the medication from an automatic dispensing cabinet that will help to resolve medication-related problems before administration of dose to the patient. Telepharmacy helps to avoid public exposures, save traveling expense as well as the time, provide medicine and other healthcare related equipment's like mask, gloves and face shields etc., for the elderly and disabled persons at their residence ¹⁰.

Drawbacks of Telepharmacy Services

Telepharmacy is sometimes challenging to put into practice. Pharmacy regulation laws despite of telepharmacy potential do not support the rising telepharmaceutical industry. Implementation of uniform telepharmacy law is still challenging. There are many of issues regarding the polices, for example- pharmacists location, technology usages, and the healthcare workers role in medicine supply, need to be addressed ¹¹. Due to geographical factors, there is a lack of accessing healthcare services in rural areas. Telepharmacy services faces challenges regarding resource. The software, hardware, connectivity, and operational cost includes significant time, effort, as well as money ¹².

CONCLUSION

Telepharmacy may have significant potential to advances the access to pharmaceutical service services, such as patient counseling, medication supervision and supply and drug data. The incorporation of new healthcare system needs for the development of growth of services across the globe. This COVID-19 epidemic should promote better use and incorporation of telepharmacy health care services. Telepharmacy will provide patient safety and will implement social distancing concept that is very much necessary to avoid community spread of infection in the current scenario. Hence, it should no longer should be considered as an option for emergency. A development system, can definitely alter the practice of pharmacy that is advantageous to the society that are delivering these healthcare services to the society. Telepharmacy will not



solve the health issues completely but it's well suited as a solution insight of current scenarios of COVID-19.

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