

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Telepharmacy Services, Remote Counseling, and Virtual Medication Review in Improving Patient Outcomes

Abdullah M. Alhelwan¹, Shatha M. Alhalwan², Alanoud N. Alsubaie³,
Hamza F. Alsamanhodi⁴

Pharmacist

Health affairs at the Ministry of National Guard

Abstract

Background: The rise of digital health interventions has prompted an exploration of their effectiveness in improving medication management. This study evaluates the impact of telepharmacy services, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews on medication adherence and clinical outcomes.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed, including a quantitative analysis of 300 patients (100 per service type) and qualitative interviews with 30 participants (10 patients and 10 healthcare professionals per service type). Quantitative data encompassed adherence rates, clinical outcomes, and patient satisfaction, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews.

Results: Telepharmacy showed the highest adherence rate (85.4%) and patient satisfaction score (4.5), and it led to the most significant improvements in blood pressure and blood glucose levels. Remote counseling and virtual medication reviews also demonstrated benefits but with slightly lower effectiveness. Qualitative analysis revealed high satisfaction with telepharmacy and virtual medication reviews, though technical issues and engagement difficulties were noted as challenges. Participants suggested enhancing technical support and increasing personalization of services.

Conclusion: Telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews effectively improve medication adherence and clinical outcomes. Telepharmacy, in particular, offers notable advantages in terms of adherence and patient satisfaction. Addressing technical challenges and personalizing care are critical for optimizing these digital health interventions.

Keywords: Telepharmacy, Remote Counseling, Virtual Medication Review, Medication Adherence, Clinical Outcomes, Patient Satisfaction, Digital Health Interventions.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed healthcare delivery, including the rise of telepharmacy services, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews. These innovations are increasingly employed to enhance accessibility, convenience, and patient engagement, particularly in the context of chronic disease management and medication adherence (Kruse et al., 2017; Leo et al., 2022).

Telepharmacy refers to the provision of pharmaceutical care through telecommunications technology, allowing pharmacists to offer services such as medication counseling, drug therapy management, and consultations without the need for physical presence (Le et al., 2020). This approach has demonstrated potential benefits in expanding access to pharmaceutical care, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Kilova, 2020). Studies have indicated that telepharmacy can effectively improve medication adherence and patient outcomes by providing timely interventions and support (Le et al., 2020).

Remote counseling involves providing healthcare guidance and support through digital platforms, including phone calls and video consultations. This mode of interaction has been shown to increase patient engagement and satisfaction, offering an alternative to traditional face-to-face counseling (Kruse et al., 2017). Remote

counseling has proven particularly valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting its role in maintaining continuity of care (Smolić et al., 2022).

Virtual medication reviews utilize digital tools to evaluate and optimize medication regimens. These reviews are conducted through video or phone consultations, allowing pharmacists to assess medication efficacy, safety, and adherence while providing personalized recommendations (Trenfield et al., 2022). Evidence suggests that virtual medication reviews can lead to improved medication management and clinical outcomes, making them a valuable component of comprehensive patient care (Chambers et al., 2022).

Despite the growing adoption of these digital health solutions, there remains a need for robust evaluations of their effectiveness. Understanding how telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews impact patient outcomes, adherence, and overall satisfaction is crucial for optimizing their implementation and enhancing healthcare delivery (Baldoni et al., 2019). This study aims to assess the effectiveness of these services in improving patient outcomes, adherence, and satisfaction, providing insights that could inform future practices and policies in digital healthcare.

Literature Review

1. Telepharmacy Services: Telepharmacy, which involves delivering pharmaceutical care via telecommunications technology, has become increasingly relevant in improving access to medication management services. A review by Le et al., (2020) highlighted that telepharmacy could effectively bridge gaps in care, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where access to physical pharmacies is limited. The study found that telepharmacy services led to improved medication adherence and better clinical outcomes due to increased accessibility to pharmaceutical care and timely interventions.

Le et al. (2020) conducted a study evaluating telepharmacy's impact on medication adherence among patients with chronic conditions. Their research demonstrated that patients who utilized telepharmacy services had significantly higher adherence rates compared to those receiving traditional in-person services. This was attributed to the convenience and regular follow-ups provided through telepharmacy, which helped in managing medication regimens more effectively.

2. Remote Counseling: Remote counseling, which encompasses telephone and video-based consultations, has been shown to enhance patient engagement and satisfaction. Kruse et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review on the effectiveness of remote counseling, concluding that it significantly improved patient outcomes and engagement. The review emphasized that remote counseling provided greater flexibility and accessibility, which contributed to increased patient satisfaction and better adherence to treatment plans.

Smolić et al. (2022) explored the role of remote counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that it played a crucial role in maintaining continuity of care. The study reported that patients appreciated the convenience of remote consultations and that the service effectively addressed barriers to in-person visits, such as transportation issues and time constraints.

3. Virtual Medication Reviews: Virtual medication reviews involve the use of digital platforms to evaluate and optimize medication regimens. Trenfield et al. (2022) investigated the impact of virtual medication reviews on medication management and adherence. Their study found that virtual reviews were effective in identifying and addressing medication-related problems, leading to improved medication safety and adherence. The ability to conduct reviews remotely allowed for more frequent and comprehensive assessments, which positively impacted patient outcomes.

Chambers et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review focusing on the role of virtual medication reviews in optimizing patient medication management. The review highlighted that virtual reviews enhanced medication adherence and clinical outcomes by providing patients with personalized medication management plans and facilitating regular follow-ups. The study also noted that virtual reviews were associated with higher patient satisfaction due to the convenience and flexibility of remote consultations.

4. Comparative Effectiveness: Comparative studies have evaluated the relative effectiveness of telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews. A study by Baldoni et al. (2019) reviewed various digital health interventions, including telepharmacy and remote counseling. The study found that while all interventions improved access and patient engagement, telepharmacy and virtual medication reviews were particularly effective in managing complex medication regimens and improving adherence.

5. Gaps and Future Research: Despite the promising findings, there are gaps in the literature regarding the long-term effectiveness of these digital health interventions and their impact on specific patient populations. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews on patient outcomes. Additionally, exploring the integration of these services into existing healthcare systems and their cost-effectiveness will provide valuable insights for optimizing their implementation.

Methodology

Study Design: This research employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate the effectiveness of telepharmacy services, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews. The study was conducted over a 12-month period and included a retrospective analysis of patient records as well as structured interviews with healthcare professionals and patients.

Sample Selection

Quantitative Analysis: A total of 300 patients from a tertiary hospital were selected for this study. These facilities implemented telepharmacy services, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews. Patients were divided into three groups based on the type of service they received:

- 1. Telepharmacy Group (n=100):** Patients who received pharmaceutical care through telepharmacy.
- 2. Remote Counseling Group (n=100):** Patients who received medication counseling through remote consultations.
- 3. Virtual Medication Review Group (n=100):** Patients who underwent medication reviews conducted via virtual platforms.

Inclusion criteria for the quantitative analysis included patients who were over 18 years old, had chronic conditions requiring ongoing medication, and were actively engaged with one of the three services. Exclusion criteria included patients with incomplete records or those who had less than three months of follow-up data.

Qualitative Analysis: For the qualitative component, 30 participants were purposively selected from the three groups. This included 10 patients from each group and 10 healthcare professionals (pharmacists and counselors) involved in the services. Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in interviews and their experience with the respective services.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data: Data were extracted from electronic health records and included:

- **Adherence Rates:** Measured by the Proportion of Days Covered (PDC) and medication refill rates.
- **Clinical Outcomes:** Changes in key health indicators (e.g., blood pressure, blood glucose levels) before and after service implementation.
- **Patient Satisfaction:** Assessed through standardized satisfaction surveys conducted at the end of the study period.

Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected patients and healthcare professionals. The interviews were designed to explore:

- **Patient Experiences:** Perceptions of the service, perceived effectiveness, and any barriers encountered.
- **Healthcare Professional Insights:** Views on the effectiveness of the services, challenges faced, and recommendations for improvement.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 27.0. Descriptive statistics summarized the demographic characteristics of the sample. Comparative analysis between the three groups was conducted using ANOVA for continuous variables (e.g., adherence rates) and chi-square tests for

categorical variables (e.g., patient satisfaction). Multivariate regression analysis was used to control for potential confounders and assess the impact of each service on clinical outcomes and adherence.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software. Codes were generated based on the interview transcripts, and themes were identified to capture common experiences and perspectives. Themes included:

- **Effectiveness of Service:** Participants' views on how well the service met their needs.
- **Challenges Encountered:** Common obstacles and difficulties faced by patients and healthcare professionals.
- **Suggestions for Improvement:** Recommendations for enhancing service delivery and patient outcomes.

Ethical Considerations: The study received approval from the ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Patient confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and all data were de-identified to ensure privacy.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

1. **Adherence Rates:** Table 1 displays the adherence rates for patients using telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews.

Service Type	Mean Adherence Rate (%)	Standard Deviation
Telepharmacy	85.4	7.6
Remote Counseling	78.2	9.1
Virtual Medication Review	82.9	8.3

2. **Clinical Outcomes:** Table 2 summarizes the changes in key health indicators before and after the implementation of each service.

Service Type	Change in Blood Pressure (mmHg)	Change in Blood Glucose Level (mg/dL)
Telepharmacy	-10.2	-12.4
Remote Counseling	-8.3	-9.1
Virtual Medication Review	-9.6	-11.7

3. **Patient Satisfaction:** Table 3 presents patient satisfaction scores, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

Service Type	Mean Satisfaction Score	Standard Deviation
Telepharmacy	4.5	0.8
Remote Counseling	4.2	0.9
Virtual Medication Review	4.3	0.7

Qualitative Findings

1. Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme 1: Effectiveness of Service

Sub-Theme 1.1: Convenience

- **Participant 12 (Patient):** "Telepharmacy was really convenient for me. I could consult with my pharmacist without having to travel, which was especially helpful given my mobility issues."
- **Participant 22 (Healthcare Professional):** "Remote consultations allowed us to reach patients who otherwise might miss their appointments due to transportation problems."

Sub-Theme 1.2: Quality of Care

- **Participant 5 (Patient):** "The virtual medication reviews were thorough, and I felt like I was getting personalized attention even though it was online."
- **Participant 8 (Healthcare Professional):** "Patients appreciated the depth of the medication reviews. We were able to address issues more effectively than in brief in-person visits."

2. Challenges Encountered

Sub-Theme 2.1: Technical Issues

- **Participant 7 (Patient):** "Sometimes the video calls would drop or have poor quality, which made communication difficult."
- **Participant 15 (Healthcare Professional):** "We had to deal with various technical difficulties, which sometimes disrupted the flow of consultations."

Sub-Theme 2.2: Engagement Difficulties

- **Participant 18 (Patient):** "I found it hard to stay engaged during remote sessions. It's different from being in the same room with someone."
- **Participant 20 (Healthcare Professional):** "Maintaining patient engagement over virtual platforms can be challenging. Some patients were less responsive during virtual meetings."

3. Suggestions for Improvement

Sub-Theme 3.1: Enhanced Technical Support

- **Participant 1 (Patient):** "Improving the technology and providing more technical support could make the experience better."
- **Participant 10 (Healthcare Professional):** "Investing in better technology and offering training for both patients and providers could reduce technical issues."

Sub-Theme 3.2: Increased Personalization

- **Participant 6 (Patient):** "It would help if there were more personalized follow-ups or check-ins to make the remote experience feel more personal."
- **Participant 11 (Healthcare Professional):** "More personalized communication strategies could help bridge the gap created by virtual interactions."

Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of telepharmacy services, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews in improving medication adherence and clinical outcomes. The results revealed several key insights into the benefits and challenges of these digital health interventions.

1. Adherence Rates: The study found that patients using telepharmacy services had the highest mean adherence rate (85.4%) compared to those receiving remote counseling (78.2%) and virtual medication reviews (82.9%). This suggests that telepharmacy may offer a more convenient and accessible platform for managing medications, which could contribute to higher adherence rates. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has highlighted the potential of telepharmacy to enhance medication adherence by providing more frequent and accessible pharmacist consultations (Le et al., 2020).

2. Clinical Outcomes: Improvements in clinical outcomes, such as reductions in blood pressure and blood glucose levels, were observed across all service types. However, telepharmacy showed slightly better results in terms of both blood pressure and blood glucose control. These findings indicate that telepharmacy may be particularly effective in managing chronic conditions that require regular monitoring and adjustment of treatment regimens. The effectiveness of telepharmacy in improving clinical outcomes aligns with the literature that emphasizes its role in providing ongoing medication management and support (Chambers et al., 2022).

3. Patient Satisfaction : Patient satisfaction scores were highest for telepharmacy (4.5) compared to remote counseling (4.2) and virtual medication reviews (4.3). This suggests that patients found telepharmacy to be the most satisfactory service, likely due to its convenience and accessibility. High patient satisfaction with

telepharmacy is supported by research indicating that patients appreciate the ease of access and the ability to engage with pharmacists remotely (Kruse et al., 2017).

4. Qualitative Insights

- **Effectiveness of Service:** The qualitative findings revealed that both patients and healthcare professionals valued the convenience and quality of care provided by telepharmacy and virtual medication reviews. Patients appreciated the ease of accessing pharmacy services without traveling, and healthcare professionals noted the effectiveness of virtual reviews in providing comprehensive medication management. These insights reinforce the quantitative findings and highlight the practical benefits of these services in improving medication management and patient engagement.
- **Challenges Encountered:** Technical issues and difficulties in maintaining patient engagement were common challenges reported by participants. Technical problems, such as poor video quality and connectivity issues, were particularly problematic and impacted the effectiveness of remote consultations. These challenges are consistent with other studies that have identified technical difficulties as a barrier to the successful implementation of telehealth services (Smolić et al., 2022).
- **Suggestions for Improvement:** Participants suggested several improvements, including enhanced technical support and increased personalization of services. Addressing technical issues and providing more personalized follow-ups could enhance the overall effectiveness and patient satisfaction of telepharmacy and virtual medication reviews. These recommendations align with the literature, which emphasizes the need for ongoing support and personalization to optimize the impact of digital health interventions (Trenfield et al. 2022; Chambers et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Overall, this study underscores the potential of telepharmacy, remote counseling, and virtual medication reviews to improve medication adherence and clinical outcomes. Telepharmacy emerged as particularly effective in enhancing adherence and satisfaction, while also demonstrating better clinical outcomes compared to other services. However, addressing technical challenges and increasing personalization are crucial for maximizing the benefits of these digital health interventions. Future research should focus on exploring long-term outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and strategies to overcome identified challenges to further enhance the implementation and impact of these services.

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