

Counseling for reproductive indications in the age of COVID-19: no longer an alternative model but a service delivery model for the present and future

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1. Introduction

Telegenetic counseling, a service that has been available for many years in the United States, experienced rapid growth during 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. We began collecting patient satisfaction with telegenetic counseling in a reproductive setting for quality improvement purposes in December 2019 and were able to continue collecting the data through the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, there were options for service delivery including in-person and telegenetic counseling, while during the pandemic there were limited options and a high utilization of telegenetic counseling due to the need for social distancing.

2. Methods

The patient satisfaction data was collected through the use of an anonymous online survey tool. We report on the overall patient satisfaction in the reproductive setting in patients who were seen for telegenetic counseling prior to (n=637) and during (n=1501) the COVID-19 pandemic, with the goal of determining if satisfaction differed between the two four-month time periods. All of the patients in this study were seen through home-based telegenetic counseling. The survey contained 10 statements designed to assess overall patient satisfaction, split into statements regarding the clinical interaction (7) and statement regarding the technology aspect of telegenetic counseling (3). Patients responded regarding their satisfaction using a 5-point Likert scale and the responses were analyzed using the one tailed T test. In addition to the overall satisfaction analysis, satisfaction was also compared based on patient response stratified by age.

3. Results

We found no significant difference in overall satisfaction between the two time periods. The average scores for all patients seen, including both pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19, ranged from 4.86 to 4.91 for the clinical statements, and 4.78 to 4.86 for the technology statements, all falling between the agree and strongly agree responses (Figure 1). The average scores for the clinical statements for patients seen pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19 ranged from 4.81 to 4.92 and 4.85 to 4.91 respectively, and the average scores for the technology statements for patients seen pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19 ranged from 4.75 to 4.85 and 4.79 to 4.87 respectively. No statistically significant differences were found in the average scores for any of the statements comparing patients seen prior to or during COVID-19.

4. Conclusions

These results demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with telegenetic counseling, using both a televideo and audio connection for the patient population studied. Based on these results in the reproductive setting, we propose that telegenetic counseling should no longer be viewed as an “alternative” service delivery model but rather as a model that addresses patient’s needs in a highly satisfactory way, and provides improved access and alternatives both during a pandemic and a non-pandemic time period.

Tables

Table 1. Average responses overall and for pre-COVID-19 compared to COVID-19 timeframe

Statements	All Patients	Pre-COVID-19	COVID-19	p-values
My genetic counselor listened carefully to what I said.	4.91	4.91	4.91	0.496
My genetic counselor explained things in a way that was easy to understand.	4.90	4.91	4.89	0.347
I received the information I needed from my genetic counselor.	4.87	4.86	4.88	0.308
My genetic counselor helped me feel like a partner in care.	4.86	4.89	4.85	0.161
My genetic counselor spent enough time with me.	4.91	4.91	4.91	0.456
I was able to share all the necessary information with my genetic counselor.	4.86	4.81	4.88	0.050
My genetic counselor answered all my questions.	4.91	4.92	4.91	0.347
I was able to hear my genetic counselor clearly and see the information that was presented.	4.78	4.75	4.79	0.197
The setting for my genetic counseling was convenient for me.	4.86	4.84	4.87	0.250
I would recommend this genetic counseling service to a friend or colleague.	4.85	4.85	4.86	0.430

(Blue rows represent the GC adapted statements; grey rows represent the satisfaction with technology statements)