

Psychiatric Telehealth Services

By **Dr Henry HUI^{1&2}**, **Dr Anna WU²**,

¹Quality & Safety Division, ²Mental Health Division, Hong Kong East Cluster

During the Emergency Response Level of COVID-19 by Hospital Authority (HA) in February 2020, there was service adjustment including psychogeriatric outreach service to elderly homes which was reserved for crisis intervention and patients with unstable mental condition. In order to enhance psychiatric support to patients during pandemic, Department of Psychiatry of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH) implemented telehealth services in phases since February 2020.

For the first phase, psychogeriatric team of PYNEH provided Teleconsultation service to provide psychiatric follow-ups for patients living in elderly homes. TeleVisit service was also developed in July 2020 to offer virtual visits to domiciliary patients and elderly home patients by community psychiatric service and psychogeriatric outreaching nurses. Psychoeducation, psychological assessments and interventions could be carried out besides mental state and physical condition monitoring during TeleVisit sessions (Figure 1).

Psychiatric Day Hospital service was also disrupted during pandemic. Psychogeriatric Day Hospital of PYNEH piloted TeleTraining since August 2020 to provide virtual rehabilitation and treatment programmes (Figure 2). Mental state monitoring and caregiver support are also important components.

Psychiatric outpatient clinic of PYNEH started TeleClinic service in April 2022. TeleClinic is a telehealth service provided by HA through HA Go platform. It provides an alternative option for patients having difficulties attending psychiatric outpatient clinic for follow-ups, e.g. patients residing in remote areas, elderly patients with mobility problems, etc.

With increasing demand of psychiatric service in Hong Kong, telehealth will become more important and widely adopted in order to maintain comprehensive clinical services to our patients with mental health needs.

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Figure 1 : virtual visits



Figure 2 : Virtual rehabilitation and treatment programmes

Editorial Comments

With recent momentum for the development of telehealth, benefits have been recognised in various care settings and patient's perspective, the Psychiatric Telehealth Services in PYNEH demonstrated the essential components of assessment, consultation, education, intervention and rehabilitations for psychiatric patients. I am convinced that this service can benefit our patients and be able to cope with the future need.

Dr M LEUNG, Senior Manager (Nursing), HAHO



Kowloon East Cluster

Allied Health Smart Telehealth Service

By *Dr Katherine NG, Ms Ann WONG, Ms Tsz Kiu CHEUNG, Mr Ka Tsun TING, Ms Yandy LI, Ms Tracy LAM, Ms Angela TANG*

Child & Adolescent Team & Adult Team, Department of Clinical Psychology, Kowloon East Cluster (KEC)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions on in-person visits to hospitals had severely limited public access to Hospital Authority (HA) clinical psychology service. In response to this challenge, the KEC Department of Clinical Psychology has been promoting telehealth services. Our parenting program was the first endorsed allied health protocol-driven telehealth service with charging and attendance taking. Since then, telehealth services have become one of our standard service delivery modes, while quality face-to-face service continues routinely especially for geriatric and pediatric clients.

While delivering tele-consultation individually, our department has been running 2-3 tele-groups every week, with each session lasting for 1.5 to 2 hours. Protocol-driven parenting tele-groups (e.g. emotion coaching, executive function) and adult tele-groups (e.g. stress management, positive psychology) were developed (Figure 1). Besides, clinical psychologists (CPs) has been actively prescribing psycho-education pamphlets, educational videos, and cognitive training to patients for practice and knowledge consolidation out of usual sessions via HA Go (Figure 2). The case CPs would conduct interviews to assess the clinical needs and recommend the most suitable group(s) or training materials for the clients. We have been widely inviting clients to receive the service especially those who are ready to try tele-consultation, and prefer not returning to hospital for frequent and regular sessions.

Telehealth service constituted around 8.5% of our total outpatient attendance in financial year 2022/23. A service evaluation conducted between July 2022 and July 2023 showed that participants' mean score of satisfaction with Telehealth service was 3.76 out of 5, indicating a moderate satisfaction level. Almost 90% participants rated telehealth service as having no

difference or even better than face-to-face service. A majority of clients positively commented such service as saving time and cost, while some clients expressed difficulties of using electronic payment, paying on or before appointment time, or lack of technical support. It is expected that continual development of such services would further increase public access to psychological services.

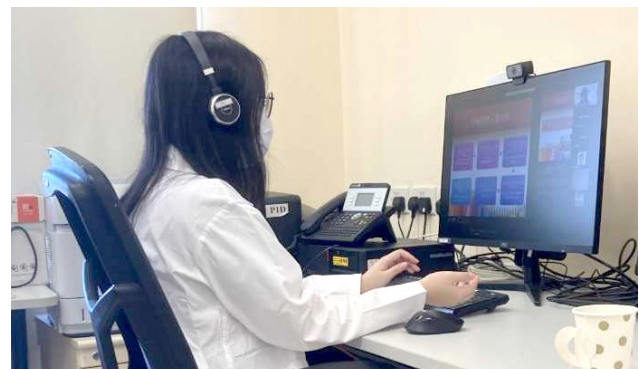


Figure 1 : CP running TeleHealth protocol I-driven group session

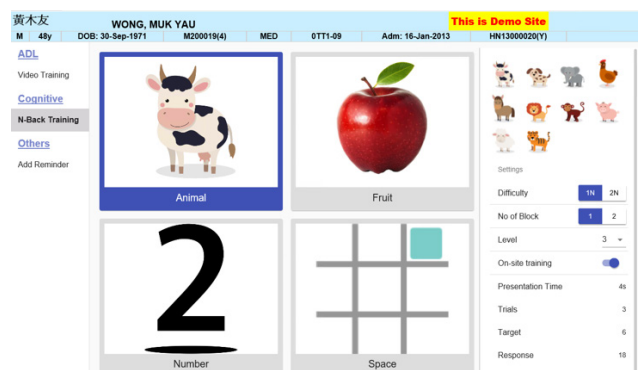


Figure 2 : Training on cognitive functions via HA Go



Editorial Comments

The KEC Department of Clinical Psychology's new service delivery model should be congratulated as it is consistent with HA's drive for Smart Care and Telehealth Initiative. It brings extra convenience and choice to patients who do not prefer frequent or regular sessions. This is amply reflected in the positive feedback and comments from service users.

Hon. Assoc. Prof. William C M CHUI, Clinical Stream Coordinator (Pharmacy), HKWC

Offering More Options to Patient - Allied Health Telecare Services

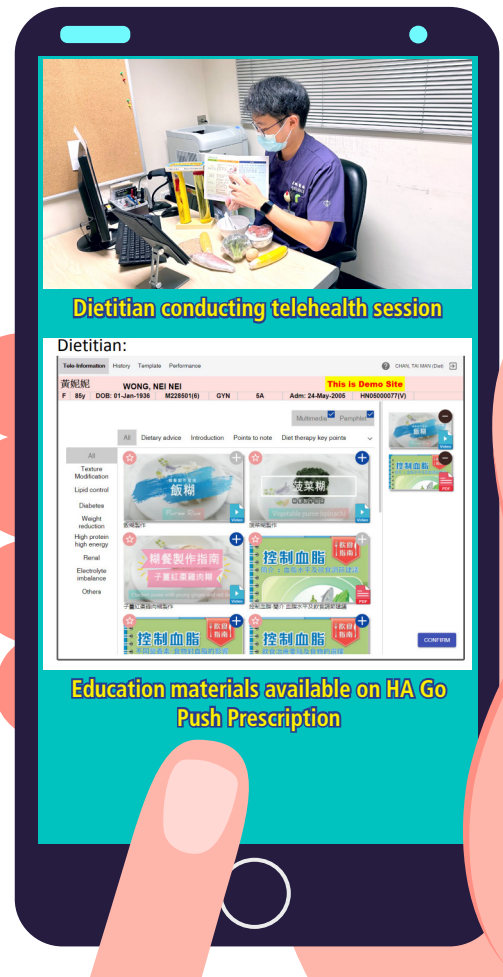
By **Coordinating Committee - Grade (Dietetics)**

Telehealth is a one-stop secured platform for patients to attend consultation by telecommunication. Patients can utilise a trusted medium with a similar patient flow as physical clinic that can provide care at hand and perform patient empowerment. The advantages include definite infection control results from social distancing with less traveling, queuing and waiting in the hospitals.

The application of telehealth in nutrition therapy for paediatrics has been feasible and comprehensive. Telehealth offers dietitians a unique opportunity to observe their patients and care-takers in home environment especially those with feeding difficulties. Dietitians can also obtain details on commercial products, usual portion sizes, supplements etc. used by patients on daily basis. The interaction will positively impact on the formulation of a personalised care plan for the child.

New Territories West Cluster offers telehealth service to patients diagnosed with obesity. Since frequent physical follow up may not be feasible among younger obese patient population due to frequent absence from work and they are more capable of using electronic devices, hence, telehealth becomes a helpful alternative. Dietitians may also have access to more information regarding commercial food products that these patients were using and be able to motivate them to adhere to their weight reduction meal plan.

Kowloon Central Cluster has been offering a comprehensive telehealth services for patients with nasal pharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) since 2022. The initial consultation is face-to-face and patients will then be introduced to telehealth service for their subsequent visits. Telehealth is particularly important during the pre-neo-adjuvant and the post-radiation therapy phases due to the vulnerability in patients' immunity system. Telehealth can potentially reduce exposure to bacterial infection, as well as provide convenience and save transportation cost.



Pros and Cons of Telehealth In Nutrition Therapy

	Pros	Cons
Patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Save time & money from travelling •Reduce queuing time •Visualise home environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Need time and skills to set up •Less personal than face-to-face consultation
Therapists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Better time control for consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Need time and skills to set up •Need support for hardware, software and training
Both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ideal for infection control •Flexibility and modern approach for patient care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Limitation in screen size of cellphones & audibility •Limitation in physical examinations

Telehealth continues to be an alternative means of providing dietetic service to patients. Although there are limitations comparing to conventional face to face consultation, Coordinating Committee - Grade (Dietetics) will continue to gather feedbacks and adhere to evidence-based protocols and guidelines for service quality assurance.

Editorial Comments

Telehealth services are growing in popularity, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic where virtual visits were brought on trend. The applications of allied health telecare services can benefit both patients and health providers by offering flexibility for consultation at patients' convenience and opportunities for better observation of patients' living habits and environment, respectively, which are difficult to achieve in face-to-face consultation. Congratulations to the allied health professionals of HA who endeavor in new technology integration and service improvement to bring about better care for patients.

Dr Osburga CHAN, Service Director (Quality & Safety), KCC

The Power of Telehealth in Neurosurgery: A Game-Changer during the COVID-Era and Beyond

By **Dr Cheng King Fai**, Department of Neurosurgery, Queen Mary Hospital

Telehealth has emerged as a revolutionary approach in healthcare delivery, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This innovative approach not only benefits patients but also enhances the overall healthcare experience. One of the key advantages of telehealth in Neurosurgery is its ability to eliminate the need for disabled patients to travel long distances for consultations.

Our first case of telehealth in Neurosurgery was on 5 July 2021, this initial implementation paved the way for the development into now weekly regular sessions. By October 2023, over 400 neurosurgical patients had received remote consultations through telehealth in the Department of Neurosurgery. The high satisfaction rate among patients indicates the effectiveness and efficiency of telehealth in Neurosurgery.



Improved Access for Home-Bound Elderly Patients:

It provides a convenient solution for patients with limited mobility, ensuring they receive timely care without physical strain. It is also a boon for caregivers as they can now actively participate in consultations and discussions without the burden of accompanying the patient to the hospital. This not only saves time but also ensures that caregivers are well-informed and involved in the patient's treatment journey.

Majority of Stable Neurosurgical Patients Requires Follow-up Imaging:

Telehealth in Neurosurgery allows for online review of radiological images, as majority of our stable patients does not need for physical examination during follow-up, doctors can explain the radiological findings to patients and caregivers online without requiring their physical presence.

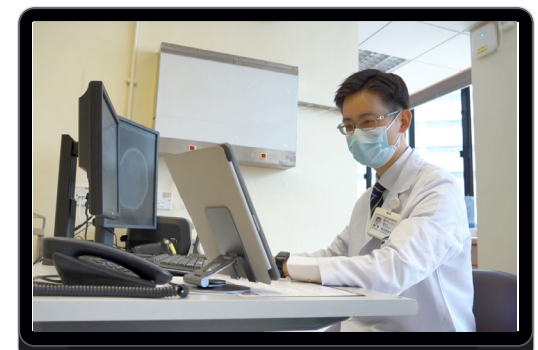
Extension of Services to Pediatric Patients:

This extension enables young patients to receive specialised care from the comfort of their homes, reducing anxiety and stress associated with hospital visits.

Implementation of Telehealth is easier when:

- Proactively recruit suitable patients upon discharge and appointment booking
- Designated "Tele-hub" with centralised manpower and IT support, ensuring seamless connectivity and technical assistance
- Patient service ambassadors helps setting up "HA Go" in patients' smartphones
- Introduction of "HA Go EasyQ" has further enhanced patient experience by enabling drug delivery services

Telehealth in Neurosurgery has witnessed significant growth, the success is evident as majority of patients have expressed high satisfaction and a willingness to continue utilizing Telehealth services in the future. As technology continues to advance, telehealth will play an increasingly vital role in improving access to care, enhancing patient experience, and optimising healthcare resources in Neurosurgery and beyond.



Editorial Comments

"Going an extra mile" amidst our busy clinical work is never easy! Applying telehealth care in stable neurosurgery patients' consultation not only were patients curtailing physical strain in travelling around, but resources like waiting areas and manpower were also allocated to patients with paramount needs in a surpassing manner. A minuscule step made an enormous difference!

Dr Judy CHU, Cluster Manager (Quality & Safety), KWC

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