

RESEARCH LETTER

Assessing Satisfaction Levels with Teledermatology in the Post-COVID-19 Era: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced patients' perception of care and willingness to engage in telehealth.

Methods: This study assessed patient satisfaction with teledermatology post-COVID-19 through a survey of individuals who had a teledermatology video visit between January 2021 and June 2023.

Results: Satisfaction was high across parameters like privacy, provider respect, and visual/audio quality. Patients appreciated the convenience and time savings of teledermatology but still preferred in-clinic visits, citing concern about whether computer views are sufficient for detailed evaluations.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that while teledermatology is well-received, ongoing improvements are needed to address limitations and enhance care quality.

INTRODUCTION

Although teledermatology increased access to care amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic may have influenced patients' perception of care and willingness to engage in telehealth. Studies conducted during the peak pandemic period may not wholly reflect the current satisfaction levels among teledermatology patients.¹ We sought to investigate patients' teledermatology satisfaction levels in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted among patients aged 18 years or older who

completed a teledermatology video visit at USF-affiliated dermatology sites from 01/1/2021 to 06/30/2023. A Qualtrics satisfaction survey adapted from Hamad *et al.*¹ was emailed to 371 patients fitting inclusion criteria. A retrospective chart review was conducted to collect demographic information and teledermatology appointment indications.

RESULTS

The median age at time of appointment was 55.47 years old (range 18.21 – 94.77). Most patients who completed a teledermatology appointment were female (54.17%) and/or white (84.09%). The most common indication for an appointment was a biopsy follow-up (35.57%) or for acne vulgaris (13.74%).

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20/371 (5.39%) completed the survey, of which 60% were very satisfied with their teledermatology experience, 25% were satisfied, and 15% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Participants selected “very satisfied” for the following measures: privacy respect, 60%; courtesy and/or respect of the provider, 65%; length of time with the provider, 50%; comfort using teledermatology, 55%; visual quality 65%; voice quality 55%. No participants expressed dissatisfaction with any measured parameters (**Figure 1**). Survey responses for subjective favorable and unfavorable aspects of teledermatology are listed (**Table 1**).

DISCUSSION

The pandemic accelerated the implementation and use of teledermatology. A previous study revealed 86.4% of 184 participants reported positive experiences and satisfaction levels with teledermatology during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study similarly found high overall satisfaction, with no respondents expressing dissatisfaction with their teledermatology experience. Patients frequently cited convenience, including reduced travel time, as a primary reason for satisfaction.

Despite high teledermatology satisfaction, most respondents expressed a preference for in-clinic visits. This may be due to the belief that in-person examinations allow for more thorough assessments, as concordance between diagnoses made remotely and those made in-person may range from 46% to 99%.²

Most respondents held a degree and had health insurance. As lower educational attainment and lack of insurance are correlated with a lower socioeconomic status, we did not adequately capture satisfaction levels from this population. This is an important limitation, as such patients may lack access and literacy necessary to complete an online survey,³ reducing the generalizability of our results. Similarly, older adults may exhibit greater hesitancy in engaging with teledermatology services due to difficulties in navigating virtual care.⁴ Such individuals may similarly exhibit difficulty or distrust navigating an online survey on an unknown platform, which may have lowered response rates among this population.

Despite these challenges, our results remain valid as they provide dermatologists with valuable insights into how teledermatology is predominantly utilized in the post-COVID-19 era. Additionally, they offer valuable qualitative feedback, outlining both favorable and unfavorable reasons to continue improving the quality of remote dermatological care.

CONCLUSION

The expansion of teledermatology during the COVID-19 pandemic increased access to care. Satisfaction levels have remained consistently high with the continued adoption of teledermatology appointments, as they reduce transportation and geographic barriers. This facilitates easier access to healthcare services for dermatological concerns among patients.

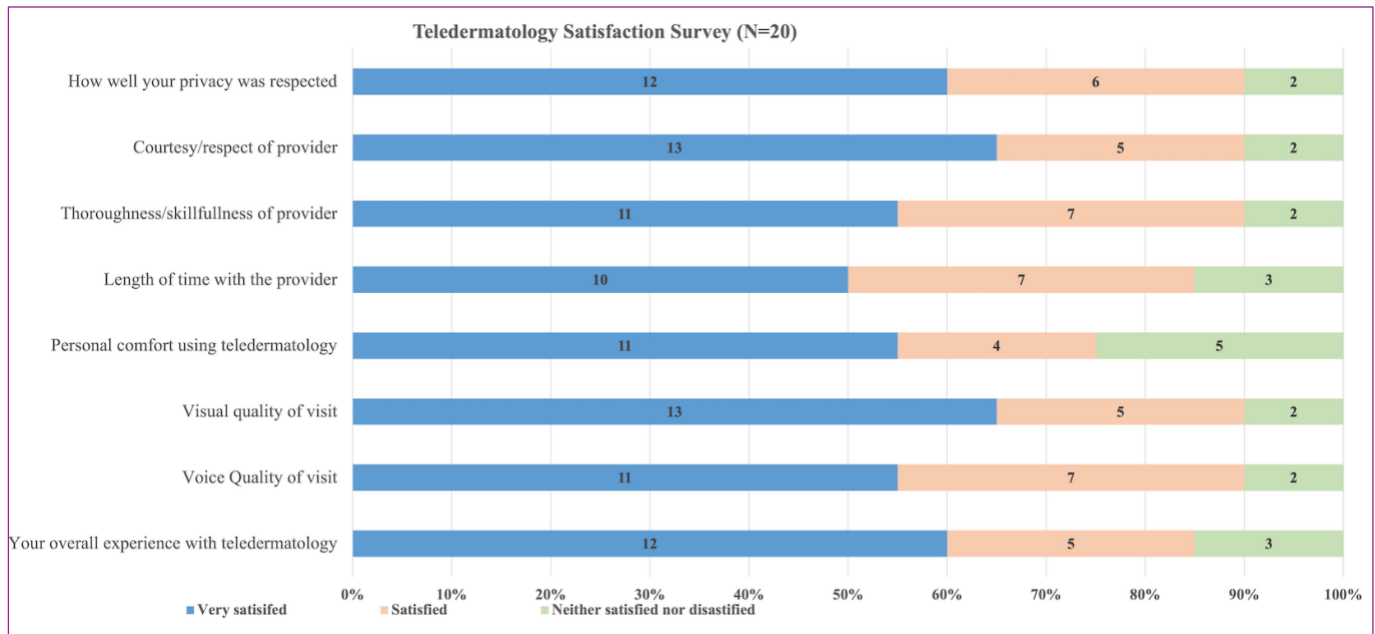


Figure 1. Satisfaction Survey Results (N=20)

Table 1. Survey responses for favorable and unfavorable aspects of teledermatology

| Describe favorable reasons for choosing teledermatology | Describe any challenges or barriers to using teledermatology |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid travel time and traffic stress ● It was a follow up to stitches being removed and I live a little over an hour away. No need to drive into Tampa for that. ● I live about 1 hour away from the university ● Overall ease - saves time, gas, wear and tear on vehicle, no waiting in a waiting room or room (I can keep working while I wait for my appointment) ● Convenience ● Convenient, faster, not having to drive and park ● Less travel time ● Easier than waiting in the office ● If there is an urgent need better accommodated by telemed; if it is a simple follow up w/o physical check ● Long drive ● Difficulty traveling to & from my appts ● I was not able to take a day off so teledermatology came in handy ● I live 2 hours away from my doctor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I don't see the benefits for dermatology. ● Wondering if the view is good enough on the computer ● Some challenges are of my age I presume. ● When there is a need for a physical check. ● Can be challenging to see detailed skin issues but since it was a follow up it did not change the treatment plan ● Provider must be able to see and preferably touch the skin of the patient during examination. |

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: Shaliz Aflatooni, Nicole Natarelli, and Dr. Lipman have no conflicts of interest to declare. Dr. Correa-Selm is a consultant for Accutec blades and Enspectra Health and a consultant and researcher for Novartis Pharmaceutical and a researcher for Pfizer and Sanofi, a speaker for La Roche-Posay, and on the advisory Board for the Jacinto Convit World Organization and the Dermatology Advisory Board for the Melanoma Research Foundation.

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