

Teledentistry: Bridging the Gap between Rural and Urban Divide

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Citation: Gupta A. (2022) Teledentistry: Bridging the Gap between Rural and Urban Divide. J Oral Med and Dent Res. 3(2):1-02.

Received: December 14, 2022 | **Published:** December 27, 2022

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Editorial

Introduction

With advancement seen in every aspect of technology, communication technology is not left untouched. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has taught the ways to have a sustainable lifestyle irrespective of the situation around us. On the verge of a complete lockdown phase, when no one was able to move outside their homes, receiving healthcare facilities emerge to be a major issue for all. Tele consultations come out as a savior for all the patients who can directly contact the specialists through an audio-video call and receive the concerned prescriptions. Teledentistry is also one of the means that aids to connect patients from a distant geographical location to a dental professional.

American Teledentistry Association describes it as the use of technology through audio-video means where a patient can communicate with a dental professional and can get expert consultation, diagnosis of the disease, and dental education even in a remotely located geographical area. The consultations via teledentistry are major of two types, one is "Real-Time consultation", and the other one is "Store-and Forward Method". In the first one, both the patient and the dentist are linked through an audio or audio-video call. Here, the patient can directly talk to the dental professional and clear all doubts regarding his/her signs and symptoms in the mouth. In the "Store-and Forward Method", the patient is

not involved whereas a dentist can share the patient's information, history, radiographs, laboratory tests, and other information through multiple providers. It aids in the specialist consultations for the patients and helps them with a better diagnosis and treatment plan for themselves.

The third type of teledentistry method is the "Remote Monitoring Method", where either hospital-based or home-based patients are monitored from a distance. In the "Near-Real-Time" method of teledentistry, a real-time image is tried to be captured at a low frame rate and low resolution. There is a large disparity seen in the healthcare system where on hand, high-end medical and dental facilities are present in the metro cities, and no primary healthcare is provided in the distant remote location. Tele dentistry helps in bridging the gap, where a patient living even in a far-off remote location can have expert advice on the ailment he/she is suffering from.

Tele dentistry gives us a solution to a familiar problem of a shortage of dental professionals and other related health care workers. A single dentist can provide consultations to more people from the comfort of his/her workspace and help the needy. Also, inter-professional communications among different specialized dentists help improve the treatment plan for the patients and thus, provide an improved, large-scale healthcare delivery system for all. The radiographs, laboratory reports, and patient information including his/her history and signs and symptoms can be shared and discussed with expert professionals to provide advanced oral health care. It is also important in cases where patients want to have a second opinion from a more experienced or trusted oral healthcare provider.

With the fast pace of the internet, the globe is moving fast and various specialized inventories do follow them. Teledentistry and its advancements are based on the internet and its speed. The distant consultations from one another end of the world have been made quite easy with the internet and teledentistry. It has also helped in lowering the cost both for the patients and the hospitals or clinics. The patients can have the best of consultations from renowned experts from the comfort of their homes. Also, the maintenance and other costs are cut down for the hospitals or clinics.

Every coin has its two sides. With so many advantages on its side, teledentistry has come up with some flaws too. It only aids in virtual consultations, diagnoses made, and treatment plan discussions. No experience of physical presence or treatment is possible with teledentistry. For receiving the treatments, still you have to visit an oral healthcare professional. Teledentistry and telemedicine have proved to be a savior in the time of crisis recently when COVID-19 has outbreak worldwide. With this technology, dental professionals can set up virtual dental clinics and help people in need of their service.