

Addressing Mental Health Disparities Using Telemental Health in Pediatric Primary Care

Poster #: Th 10

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Abstract

Background: The state of youth mental health in the United States has reached a critical level, marked by a high prevalence of mental health conditions and alarmingly low treatment rates. Persistent mental health disparities further exacerbate this crisis, compelling pediatric primary care providers to take on an increasingly significant role in addressing the mental health needs of youth. This situation underscores the pressing need for innovative solutions. To bridge these treatment gaps and deliver effective care, the integration of telemental health in primary care settings for diagnostic assessment, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and care management of pediatric mental health conditions is a promising avenue.

Purpose: The purpose of this poster presentation is to review the advantages, challenges, and practical application of integrating telemental health into pediatric primary care practice, emphasizing its impact on health disparities.

Methods: A comprehensive narrative review was conducted to synthesize existing evidence on the topic. Databases searched included CINAHL, MEDLINE, and APA PsychInfo. Content analysis was utilized to identify the main themes in the review of the literature.

Results: The integration of telemental health in pediatric primary care has many advantages and challenges that require consideration in its practical application. The advantages of telemental health, such as its feasibility, convenience, and positive clinical outcomes, offer promising opportunities for expanding access to mental health services. However, several challenges, including provider competence, privacy concerns, and disparities in service utilization, must be carefully navigated to ensure equitable and inclusive service provision. Additionally, practical application considerations related to assessment, treatment, billing, and referrals are vital components of a comprehensive and holistic approach to telemental health in primary care that can help reduce disparities and enhance mental health outcomes for diverse pediatric populations.

Conclusion: The integration of telemental health into pediatric primary care represents a critical step forward in improving youth mental health outcomes. Pediatric primary care providers are in a prime position to address challenges and leverage the advantages of implementing this service into clinical practice.

Key Words: Telemental health, health disparities, pediatrics, primary care