

Invited Editorial Journal of Cardiac Surgery Omar M Lattouf MD PHD FACC FACS

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Abstract

This is an invited editorial of an article to be published in the Journal of Cardiac Surgery

Invited Editorial

Journal of Cardiac Surgery

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The article on the “Effectiveness of Telemedicine in a Mitral Valve Center of Excellence” in the current issue of the Journal of Cardiac Surgery by Irina Kolesnik, Sari D. Holmes, Rachael Quinn, Filomena Koenigsberg, and James S. Gammie is a timely article that deserves the attention of practicing cardiac surgeon as it provides much needed data on the value, usefulness, patients and surgeons acceptance of the use of tele-health as a new method of

clinical connectivity between patients and their surgeons without compromising outcomes.

As said in layman’s terms, “Necessity is the Mother of Invention”, tele-health became a much needed modality as Covid disrupted every aspect of our lives including how medicine and surgery were practiced. Covid became a very strong driver for the adoption of tele-health in a matter of days after its explosive onset world wide.

Despite the fact that, historically and for several decades, there was interest in tele-health, its application was extremely limited due to multiple reasons including patient and physician lack of awareness and none or extremely limited acceptance by Medicare, Medicaid and third party payers.

The onset and the lingering of Covid with unknown end in sight, impacted people’s mobility, social distancing, self-isolation, travel restrictions and restrictions on in-person meeting, along with the fear of disease transmission created unprecedented environments that impacted the time-honored patient-physician in-person visits, consultations and evaluation.

Despite these burdensome changes imposed by the social distancing, patients continued to have illnesses that required advanced care, continued to require evaluation for operative procedures and for those patients who undergo the required procedures to have the much needed post operative evaluation, assessment and care post-discharge.

Tele-health, out of great necessity, became of high interest and value to healthcare providers, government agencies responsible for guiding the health of the nation, as well as for technology companies and entrepreneurs interested in new business opportunities. The confluence of events and opportunities, the availability of tele-health technologies and devices, and the pressing need to continue the needed patient care

resulted in rapid acceptance and utilization of telehealth application almost overnight. New, user-friendly and innovative tele-health techniques and devices became widespread. Institutions across the globe started deploying tele-health as an acceptable alternative to in-person meetings.

Thus, many institutions and physicians in different subspecialties adopted the use of telehealth and were able to provide consultations and remote care for their patients, despite national lockdowns and thus were able to circumvent all the restrictions on mobility and in-person contacts that became widespread across the globe.

A recent report by M Melchionna published in mHealth Intelligence magazine on March 4, 2022 in a survey on 4300 patients indicated that tele-health was adopted at surprisingly high rate reaching over 50% of the patient-physician encounters during the height of the pandemic in 2020. Furthermore the patient satisfaction was high reaching 860 on a 1000-point scale.

Thus, even who were evaluated and underwent complex cardiac procedures such as mitral valve repair or replacement, the perceived effectiveness and acceptance by patients and surgeons was very impressive with 97% of patients giving a very satisfied or satisfied grade and only 3% who were unsatisfied. This high level of acceptance is inline with what is reported above by Melchionna, thus giving further support to what our surgical colleagues have stated in their article.

As a physician who has been interested in tele-health and tele-medicine for the last forty years, I believe the time has come for tele-health and digital health to take central role in many aspects of patient-provider relations.

Cardiac surgeons would be served well to learn from the experience of Dr. Kolesnik and colleagues. The time is now to examine and deploy strategic steps to incorporate digital health into the practice of cardiac surgery..