
Skype: Top Use in Chronic Disease Management



Skype is increasingly being used in telemedicine, with clinicians utilising this popular web-based video tool more commonly to provide healthcare for adults than for children, according to new research from the Centre for Online Health, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

Researchers found that the use of Skype was most prevalent in the management of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, followed by educational and speech and language pathology applications. Their findings are reported in the *International Journal of Medical Informatics*.

Nigel R. Armfield, PhD (Medicine), MSc, a research fellow at the Centre for Online Health, The University of Queensland, and colleagues conducted a review of the literature to identify how Skype is being used in clinical care or clinical education. Skype is a free software application that allows PCs and mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, to be used for video communication over the internet. The online tool can also be used to send instant messages and for exchanging files and images.

While a previous review found no evidence in favour of, or against the clinical use of Skype, anecdotally it is believed to be widely used in healthcare for providing clinical services. However, the range of clinical applications in which Skype has been used has not been described.

For this new review, Dr. Armfield's team searched three electronic databases and found 239 unique articles. Of these, only 27 articles met the team's criteria for further review. Most reported uses of Skype in healthcare were in developed countries, the researchers noted. Despite being a low-cost approach, clinical use of Skype in developing countries appeared to be sparse.

"While Skype may be a pragmatic approach to providing telemedicine services, in the absence of formal studies, the clinical and economic benefits remain unclear," Dr. Armfield and colleagues conclude.

Image credit: The University of Queensland

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