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Investigating Disparities in Telehealth Utilization: An Analysis of COVID-19 Research Database

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TREO

Technology, Research, Education, Opinion

Investigating Disparities in Telehealth Utilization

An Analysis of COVID-19 Research Database

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Despite considerable efforts to encourage telehealth use, during the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed a potential widening of health inequities that will continue to plague the US Healthcare system (Schillinger, 2020; Chang et al., 2021). Social determinants of health, such as economic stability, educational access and quality, and health care access and quality, contribute to wide health disparities and inequities (HHS, n.d.). As we seek to promote telehealth utilization, it is imperative that we consider the factors that contribute to the low telehealth utilization of people in socioeconomically challenged positions. Our ongoing project aims to examine social determinants of health and identify their associations with the use of telehealth. We analyze data provided by COVID-19 Research Database Consortium that includes private and public partnerships across industries in the U.S. to facilitate data sharing and promote public health research. We retrieved medical claims of about 10 million patients, and categorical variables were created to stratify the patients into groups by demographics and socioeconomic status. A multiple logistic regression analysis was used to determine the odds of patients in different groups using telehealth during the study period. Our results suggest that age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, employment status contribute to disparities in telehealth utilization. We recommend that to facilitate access to telehealth for individuals in vulnerable positions, we must overcome socioeconomic barriers to its use. In addition, we discuss challenges and limitations of analyzing open healthcare data for research.

References

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