Can’t I just skype with my patients?

Getting Started with Telepsychiatry!

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Why Telepsychiatry?

- Convenience
- Efficiency
- Travel/Vacations
- Make Money
- Better Service Delivery
- International Applicability
- Like to Use Technology

Language of Telepsychiatry

- Videoconferencing
- Videoteleconferencing
- Teleconferencing
- Telepresence…
  (Online therapy? Web therapy?)

- Host site vs Remote site(s)

Technology

- **Hard Technology** = equipment and transmission system
  vs
- **Soft Technology** = etiquette, scheduling, medical record, prescribing, tech support…

Important Issues

1) Efficacy/Effectiveness/Equivalence?
2) Licensure
3) Reimbursement
4) Professional Liability

1) Efficacy/Effectiveness/Equivalence

Telepsychiatry vs “In-Person”

The verdict is in – YES!
(with rare exceptions)
2) Licensure

- You need to be licensed in the state where your patient resides
- Guidelines for telemedicine/telepsychiatry practice
- Varies by state: Check with licensing board

3) Reimbursement

- Self pay
- Medicare: special requirements
  - geographic, facility, procedure
- Medicaid: varies by state
- Insurance companies: the big disconnect!
  In network? Out of network? Expect surprises. Be persistent
- CPT coding: “GT modifier” added

References

  "Telepsychiatry leads to high patient and provider satisfaction ratings, and outcomes equivalent to in-person care, while younger generations often prefer telepsychiatry over face-to-face encounters."

  "Telepsychiatry or telemental health is effective, well accepted, and comparable to in-person care."

  "...CPT over VTC may be equivalent to the treatment delivered in person..."

References (continued)

  "The CATTS trial demonstrated the effectiveness of a telehealth service model to treat ADHD in communities with limited access to specialty mental health services."

  "This study demonstrates feasibility and utility of neurocognitive testing in Spanish using TP among older rural Latinos."

  "VTC-based neuropsychological testing is a valid and reliable alternative to traditional face-to-face assessment using selected measures."

References (continued)

  "...the current meta-analysis concludes there is no difference in accuracy or satisfaction between the two modalities."

References (continued)

  "The telepsychiatry approach was enthusiastically accepted by virtually all residents, family members, and nursing home personnel, and led to successful patient management. Providing psychiatric care to rural nursing home residents by videoconference is cost effective and appears to be a medically acceptable alternative to face-to-face care."

  "...satisfaction was generally very high, with telemedicine services provided over a period of up to 10 years perceived to be of similar (no worse) quality than in-person services."

  "...the current meta-analysis concludes there is no difference in accuracy or satisfaction between the two modalities."

ADHD = attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; CATTS = Children’s ADHD Telemental Health Treatment Study; TP = telepsychiatry

CPT = cognitive processing therapy; VTC = video-teleconferencing.
4) Professional Liability

- Make sure you are covered
- Get it in writing
- Don’t rely on assurances of “self insured”

How much does the hardware cost?

- **Budget:** PC (or tablet) based  <$1000
- **Mid-range:** dedicated “codec” ~$2000 to $5000
  - PTZ camera, remote control, auxiliary microphone
  - eg, Lifesize®, Polycom®
- **High-end:**
  - eg, Tandberg, Cisco, Avaya >$20,000
  - (better cameras, bigger monitors, better audio, sophisticated custom controls)

How to connect?

- **Hardwired:** direct connection
  - T1, multiple ISDN = expensive
- **Internet-based:** cable (modem), fiber optic, satellite…
  - Inexpensive, but secure?
  - Encryption, HIPAA compliant?
- **Wireless:** Wi-Fi
  - Office-based? Home-based? Public?
- **Cell phone-based:** 3G, 4G, (5G)
- **“The Cloud”**

HIPAA = Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act; ISDN = integrated services for digital network.

Can’t I just Skype with my patients?

- **Microsoft/Skype Terms of Service** (annotations)
  - www.microsoft.com/en-us/servicesagreement/
- **Microsoft Privacy Statement:** Microsoft collects and shares personal data about your communications…with subsidiaries or affiliates…
  - eg, “time and date”, “member or usernames”
  - partner(s) use data subject to its own privacy policy…
- **Your content:** you grant to Microsoft a worldwide license to use (and distribute) Your Content

Microsoft/Skype Terms of Service (continued)

- **Microsoft** will “comply with applicable law or respond to valid legal process,” including from law enforcement or other government agencies
- **Updates**
  - “We may change the terms at any time…”
  - Contracted entity, choice of law, **jurisdiction**
- **Warranties:** “… use of the services is at your own risk… You bear the entire risk… We do not guarantee the services will be uninterrupted, timely, secure or error-free…”
- **Limitation of liability:** “…up to $10 if the Services are free.”
Microsoft/Skype Terms of Service (continued)

- Terms specific for Skype:
  - No access to Emergency Services
  - May place limits on type, duration or volume of calls… you are able to make
  - Your use of Skype is for personal and non-commercial use
- Binding Arbitration and Class Action Waiver

HIPAA Compliance?

Privacy (PHI), Security

“Business Associates Agreement”

“Conduit”?

(NEW: “Skype for Business”)

If you want a salaried job doing telepsychiatry from your own office:

- Companies:
  - Insight Telepsychiatry – based in NJ (Pennsylvania)
  - JSA Health Telepsychiatry – based in Texas and Florida (California)
  - Corizon Health – Tennessee, correctional facilities, 27 states
  - VA system
- Issues:
  - Patient population, licensure, salary, benefits, liability, support, records, scheduling, etc
- Locum tenens companies

If you want to do telepsychiatry from your hospital, clinic, or private office:

- Companies supplying tech solutions and services:
  - Vsee
  - Secure Telehealth
  - CloudVisit
  - Vidyo
  - SecureVideo
  - LiveTherapy
  - WebEx (Cisco)
  - Zoom
  - 1DocWay
  - Telepsychiatry IO

Caveats

- HIPAA compliance: “Business Associates Agreement”
  - but – check the “Terms of Service”
  - (“Privacy Statement”)

Before you sign up:

- Hardware, software, compatibility?
- Costs: per month? Per visit?
- “Free trial period”
- Support: technical, scheduling, billing
- Professional liability?

New Telepsychiatry Businesses

(analogous to Internet dating)

eg, Advanced Telemed, Breakthrough, WeCounsel, E-psychiatry, Iris Telehealth, InnovaTel...

Patients sign up
Clinicians sign up
Patients match to clinicians
Connect in “the Cloud”

Additional Caveats

• Vetting the clinicians?
• Vetting the patients?
• (Vetting the company!)
• Third-party reimbursement?

➢ Again:
   Check Terms of Service and Privacy Statement

Resources and Required Reading

American Telemedicine Association (ATA)
Practice Guidelines 2009, 2013

Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare

American Telemedicine Association

Practice Guidelines for Video-Based Online Mental Health Services, May 2013

Real-time videoconference services conducted via the Internet

(Not refer to store/forward, e-mail, chat, social networking, online coaching…)

Clinical Issues

• Informed consent?
• Consultation vs Ongoing therapy
• Mandatory reporting
• The Setting: Institution vs Home
• Clinician availability
• Prescribing
• Termination of treatment
**Managing emergencies

Managing Emergencies

• Involuntary hospitalization
• Patient safety – danger to self or others
  ❖ With available on-site professionals
  ❖ Without available on-site professionals
  ❖ The “uncooperative” patient
  ❖ Transportation
  ❖ Local emergency personnel

### Patient Issues
- Specific patient population: child/adolescent, geriatric, developmentally disabled
- Diagnosis: eg, overt psychosis
- Cognitive functioning
- Medical/Neurological

### Logistics
- Structure and timing of services
- Record keeping
- Scheduling
- Technical failures
- Billing
- Coordination of care

### Physical Environment
- Privacy
- Seating
- Lighting
- Audio
- Camera placement
- Control of equipment – remote control? PIP?
- Technical support

### Medical Issues
- Medication – prescribing
- Medication side effects
- Comorbid medical conditions
  - Medical emergencies
- Lab tests and results

### Cost Effectiveness
*Does Telepsychiatry cost more or less than “in-person” Psychiatry?*

It depends on:
1) The price of the equipment and the transmission costs
2) Whether the equipment is paid for exclusively by the telepsychiatry program or whether some costs are shared by other programs (eg, other medical specialties, administrative programs)
3) The cost of technical support
4) On how far the treating psychiatrist would have to travel in order to conduct in-person treatment and on the cost of the support staff at the remote end
5) The volume of cases treated
6) The reimbursement rate
7) And last, but not least, it depends upon the observer

### Telepsychiatry
*In the eye of the observer*
- The Patient
- The Insurance Company
- The Health Care Provider
- Society
### Funding Issues

- Grant Funding of Pilot Studies
- Decreasing Costs of hardware and telecommunications lines
- Question of Medicare/Medicaid, Third-Party Insurance reimbursement?
  - eg, Recent NY state legislation

### Research Applications

- Efficient and consistent screening
- Standardization of assessments across multiple sites
- A broader population base

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### Telepsychiatry

#### Future Directions

- Implications for Clinical Care
  - Necessity vs Luxury
- Effect of “Affordable Care Act”

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### Is Telepsychiatry for you?

A modest suggestion:
- Try it out on 1 patient in your existing practice
- Work out the kinks
- Expand…

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### Medical Legal Challenges for Telepsychiatry: Take-Home Points

- Make sure you are licensed in the state where the patient resides
- Make sure your malpractice carrier covers Telepsychiatry—get it in writing
- Make sure the system that you use is HIPAA compliant
- Have a back-up plan if your videoconference connection breaks or is not available
- Have a plan for dealing with emergencies
- Caution your patients against using unencrypted connections, eg, public WiFi