

Dial 'T' for trepidation: junior doctors early encounters with telehealth in the emergency department

Christopher Stubbe¹, **Jane Kealey**², **Rowan O'Hagan**², **Ambica Dattakumar**³, **Helen Haines**^{1,2}

¹University of Melbourne; ²Northeast Health Wangaratta; ³Institute for Broadband Enabled Society

Background: The majority of recent medical graduates undertaking their first rotation in rural health have had little or no training to prepare them for the challenge of examining, diagnosing and treating a patient using Telehealth.

In 2014, a Telehealth after hours emergency service was developed in Central and Upper Hume region of Victoria to support outlying urgent care centres when there are no after hours medical practitioners available. Junior doctors rostered in the referral hospital treat patients triaged as Category 3, 4 and 5 from the outlying sites via Telehealth as part of their usual workload in the emergency department.

Aims: To assess the clinical comfort of junior doctors in a regional emergency department providing care to patients presenting via Telehealth.

To design a short on-line Telehealth training module targeted to junior doctors in a regional emergency department.

Methods: Junior doctors in the regional emergency department were invited to either respond to a self report questionnaire, structured face to face or structured telephone interview. The survey and interview questions followed the AIHW framework health performance indicators. Clinician confidence was measured using visual analogue scale (VAS) with higher scores indicating greater confidence. Thematic analysis was undertaken to reveal key aspects of the Telehealth encounter.

Results: 9 junior doctors participated in the study (43%). The mean score on 100mm VAS was 37, (range 0-80). The dominant themes were the challenge of remote physical examination, confidence in choosing the appropriate patients, determining the capacity of the staff from the referring hospital in assisting the examination and establishing mutual trust. An online training package were developed in response to the issues raised by the junior doctors.

Conclusions: Undertaking a successful clinical assessment via Telehealth can be a new and potentially stressful situation for the junior doctor in an emergency department setting. A short orientation teaching module may help to equip the new junior doctor in the skills required to successfully treat patients presenting via Telehealth.