

TELEPSYCHIATRY SERVICES FOR ENSURING CONTINUITY OF CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IMHANS EXPERIENCE

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Background: The Covid-19–related restrictions in public transport had resulted in disruption of care of persons with mental illnesses. The present article aims to describe the experience of organizing a Telepsychiatry program for ensuring continuity of care during the COVID-19 pandemic from the doctors’ as well as the patients’ perspectives. **Methods:** We initiated a synchronous Telepsychiatry program for continuity of care using a Government- sponsored online platform with facility for consulting a psychiatrist and E prescription. Three months later we conducted Video Focus Group discussion (VFGD) among the doctors involved in the program and telephonic interviews with randomly selected patients and caretakers to evaluate the merits and demerits of the program and to elicit suggestions for improvement. **Results:** The online services were availed by 120 patients (55% males) with majority in the 19-60 years age group and 47.5% of the patients were availing psychiatry consultation for the first time. Over all, depression and anxiety were the common diagnoses. Both doctors and patients felt that on line services are feasible and acceptable, ensure adequate privacy and provide the opportunity to avail mental health services without stigma. **Conclusion:** Telepsychiatry has the potential to develop in to an alternate model of mental health services, especially in resource poor settings. Mental health support to people in prisons, government residential facilities and geographically isolated areas through online platforms is a feasible and cost effective option.