

## EDITORIAL

# THE ROLE & IMPACT OF TELEMEDICINE ON HEALTHCARE IN PAKISTAN

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Telehealth is the use of telecommunication technology, including computers, mobile phones, and other electronic devices, to set up and provide healthcare remotely using health services and data. Telehealth was regarded as a revolutionary approach that revolutionized the field of medicine in recent years.<sup>1</sup> For in-person consultations, many people still prefer to attend medical centre's, despite having telemedicine's ability to manage time and geographic barriers and provide accurate information for disease diagnosis, treatment and prevention. Pakistan has several health-care issues, just like many other highly populated nations worldwide. Socioeconomic, cultural, and societal barriers to healthcare contributes majorly. Due to COVID-19, but also in recent years due to the efforts of academic institutions and non-profit organizations, telemedicine use in Pakistan has increased.<sup>2,3</sup> Patient satisfaction is a complex measure of a patient's contentment with their medical care. However, it's critical that we recognize that broad acceptance and high levels of satisfaction among patients and medical professionals are essential to the success of telemedicine. This calls for participation in administrative support, system design, dependability and usability. According to a 2016 World Health Organization (WHO) telemedicine survey, Pakistan had no laws or rules governing the use of telemedicine.<sup>4</sup> According to the literature review, a significant percentage of people have used both in-person and virtual medical consultations at some stage in their lives. Nguyen et al.'s study also showed that shorter travel distances and lower expenses increase patients' desire to use telemedicine. Therefore, when developing a telemedicine system,

it is important to consider not just the treatment or health dimensions but also the other aspects that have been included.<sup>5</sup> Telemedicine shows promise to greatly improve healthcare delivery in Pakistan by overcoming access gaps and increasing health outcomes across the country by utilizing lessons learned and resolving current issues.<sup>3</sup> Patients still prefer in-person consultations, even with telemedicine's potential to remove barriers and offer effective medical treatments. Benefits of telemedicine over in-person appointments include time and money savings, illness prevention, and elimination of distance. Utilizing these advantages could serve as the foundation for focused marketing and awareness campaigns that highlight the concrete advantages of telemedicine. Patients still prefer in-person visits despite the benefits of telemedicine, highlighting the significance of efficient change management in healthcare.<sup>6</sup> Distant regions of Pakistan, such as Dera Ismail Khan, along with other developing nations, telemedicine has the potential to be a game-changer, breaking down long-standing obstacles to healthcare access, especially in poor and distant locations. Considerable benefits of telemedicine include improved patient satisfaction, cost savings, communication, and convenience. In contrast, face-to-face care involves spending time with doctors and engaging in human interactions. Patients still prefer in-person visits over telemedicine, despite its benefits, which emphasizes the need of efficient change management in the healthcare industry. It is in favour of hybrid healthcare models, which might improve the effectiveness of healthcare delivery while accommodating a range of patient demands.

**KEY WORDS:** Telemedicine; In-person Healthcare; Patient Satisfaction; Technology Acceptance.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

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All the authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.



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