BACKGROUND

• The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a rapid scale up of telehealth
• Equitable reach of telehealth is of concern due to differential access to devices and broadband suitable for telehealth and technology literacy across patient populations
• Telehealth could exacerbate pre-existing disparities in healthcare access and quality for patients/families with limited English proficiency (LEP)
• Telehealth usage with LEP patients remains insufficiently understood.

METHODS

• Information from outpatient video telehealth physician, advanced practice provider and mental health clinician encounters from January-December 2020 were abstracted from the electronic medical record at Children’s Hospital Colorado.
• Telehealth encounters were stratified by LEP patient status.
• We defined an LEP patient as a patient for whom child OR parent/guardian preferred healthcare language was not English AND/OR interpreter needed was set to ‘yes’.
• Univariate statistics were used to describe telehealth use over time

RESULTS

• A mean of 4.8% (SD: 0.8) of telehealth encounters were conducted with LEP patients/families in 2020
• LEP patients were underrepresented in telehealth encounters compared to the 2019 percentage of all types of LEP patient visits (11.5%).
• Of telehealth providers, 53% (n=540) had any encounters with LEP patients
  • Median of 2 LEP encounters/provider (IQR: 1,6)
  • 6.8% of providers (n= 69) were high LEP telehealth providers (≥ 10 LEP encounters), completing 58% of all LEP telehealth encounters
  • Median of 15 (IQR:7,14) LEP encounters/provider, median percent of LEP encounters for these providers was 11% (IQR: 7.14).
• Bilingual English/Spanish providers in the high LEP group had a median percent of LEP telehealth encounters of 34% (IQR: 17.48).

CONCLUSIONS

• LEP patients were underrepresented in pandemic telehealth encounters
• Attention in hospital communications to telehealth with LEP patients and improvements in platform interpreter integration had little impact on frequency of LEP telehealth encounters
• LEP encounters were concentrated among few providers in the health system
• Bilingual providers had substantially higher rates of LEP telehealth encounters

IMPLICATIONS

• High rates of LEP telehealth encounters among some providers suggest family-level barriers to telehealth can be overcome
• Further evaluation of provider- and organizational-level barriers are needed to address LEP telehealth disparities
• Efforts to improve technology access and literacy for LEP families remain important

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