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THE EQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES THROUGH TELEMEDICINE: APPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Rafadi Khan Khayru, Fayola Issalillah

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

correspondence: rafadi.khankhayru@gmail.com

Abstract *- The distribution of access to healthcare in Indonesia is a major challenge due to the vast geography and disparity between urban and rural areas. Telemedicine uses information and communication technology to provide remote healthcare services, addressing this challenge. This study reviews the application of telemedicine to equitable access to healthcare in Indonesia through an analysis of related literature. The results show that telemedicine overcomes geographical barriers and limited infrastructure, enabling access to services in remote areas. Telemedicine also reduces the burden of travel and costs, improving equity in access. However, technological infrastructure and data privacy challenges need to be addressed. The digital divide between the younger and older generations must be addressed with intensive education and mentoring. Collaboration between the government, healthcare providers, and stakeholders is required for the effective and sustainable implementation of telemedicine in healthcare access equity in Indonesia.*

Keywords: equal distribution of access to healthcare, telemedicine, Indonesia, technology infrastructure, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have made telemedicine possible. In the beginning, this technology only allowed voice communication over the phone, but as technology has evolved, telemedicine has grown rapidly in recent years and allows for more sophisticated interactions between patients and medical personnel, such as video conferencing and text messaging.

Telemedicine has become an increasingly popular and rapidly growing form of healthcare in recent years. Remote communication technologies, such as video conferencing, telephone, or text messaging, are used to connect patients with medical personnel. In telemedicine, patients can receive the required treatment remotely, such as physical therapy, speech therapy, or cognitive therapy. Telemedicine is also applied in various medical fields, including online doctor consultations, remote medication, and disease diagnosis.

One technology that enables telemedicine is video conferencing platforms, which are becoming increasingly sophisticated and easy to use. Platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet have become common platforms used for online doctor consultations, remote therapy, and telemedicine. The use of these video conferencing platforms allows patients and medical personnel to communicate visually, thereby improving communication between patients and doctors and facilitating diagnosis.

Furthermore, in addition to video conferencing platforms, wearable technology has also made remote medicine possible. Wearable technologies, such as smartwatches, activity trackers, and health sensors, allow patients to monitor their own health conditions and transmit information to medical personnel in real-time. This allows doctors to monitor patients' conditions remotely and provide the necessary treatment more quickly and effectively.

Another technology that can expand healthcare accessibility is the availability of health apps on smartphones. These health apps can provide health information to patients, organize treatment schedules, and monitor patients' health conditions. Some apps even allow patients to talk to doctors directly through the app. In the field of medicine, technology has also enabled the creation of medical robots that can be used to perform remote surgery or assist doctors in performing surgery. These medical robots are equipped with camera and sensor technology that allows doctors to operate the robots remotely and perform precise surgeries.

Health is a fundamental human right. Although the number of health workers is sufficient, their distribution is uneven. In the regions, health promotion and community empowerment are also not optimal due to the lack of extension workers (Ganiem, 2020). However, despite widespread agreement on the importance and potential benefits of telemedicine, the realization of these benefits is often slower than anticipated, often due to implementation difficulties (Ross et al., 2016). Equitable access to healthcare is one of the major challenges faced by many countries, including Indonesia. As an archipelago with a population spread across many regions, Indonesia faces difficulties in providing equitable access to health services for its entire population. This problem is exacerbated by limited health infrastructure in remote areas and the difficulty of achieving quality healthcare services. The application of telemedicine can overcome the challenge of how access to health services must be evenly felt by the community. This paper will briefly review the application of telemedicine in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research method uses a qualitative-descriptive approach. The purpose of this literature review is to collect and analyze existing literature on the application of telemedicine in efforts to equalize access to health services in Indonesia. The source search was conducted with the Google search engine by determining keywords relevant to the research topic, such as "telemedicine,", "equal access to health services" and "Indonesia". Literature searches through electronic databases, scientific journals, official websites, and other reliable sources Selection of literature sources relevant to the research topic by considering the year of publication, research methods, and novelty of information The criteria in this review are paper publications dating back ten years. Journals are open-access and can be downloaded. The paper discusses the implementation of telemedicine. Journals have qualitative and quantitative research designs that use Indonesian or English.

From the critical analysis of the literature, concepts and approaches that exist in the literature that are relevant to the implementation of telemedicine and equitable access to health services in Indonesia will be found. After that, the various findings are organized, and a narrative is presented according to the purpose of this paper. Finally, conclusions will be drawn based on the relevant literature related to equitable access to health services through telemedicine in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Indonesia, in healthcare practice, telemedicine has been used through communication channels such as the telephone, internet, and other communication networks in the form of care, diagnosis, consultation, and treatment, as well as health data exchange and remote scientific discussions. Patients can also enjoy home care services, order medicine, and conduct laboratory examinations with the integrated concept of mobile applications and online transportation services. BPJS Health has a computing system that allows first-level health facilities to refer patients to advanced levels online (Ganiem, 2020; Darmawan et al., 2022; Issalillah & Khayru, 2022).

Access to quality healthcare is one of the main challenges faced by many countries, including Indonesia. Geographical factors, limited infrastructure, and disparities between urban and rural areas are barriers to ensuring that all individuals have equal access to healthcare. In the face of these challenges, telemedicine has emerged as a promising solution to improve equitable access to healthcare.

Telemedicine is the use of information and communication technology to provide remote healthcare services. In the context of telemedicine, patients can access health services without having to physically meet with medical personnel. Through telemedicine, patients can communicate with doctors or medical personnel through video conferencing, telephone, or other online communication platforms. This allows patients who are in remote or hard-to-reach areas to get the healthcare services they need.

One of the main advantages of telemedicine is that it can improve access to healthcare in remote areas, overcome distance and time constraints, and provide faster, more efficient, and more affordable healthcare. The use of telemedicine can help reduce healthcare costs, save travel time and costs, and improve accessibility to healthcare in remote areas. Telemedicine creates effectiveness and convenience (Bull et al., 2016).

With the rapid development of technology, telemedicine can continue to grow and provide greater benefits to society, especially in overcoming the gap in accessibility of health services in remote areas and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health services in general. The implementation of telemedicine has great potential to expand access to healthcare services to remote and hard-to-reach areas in Indonesia. With the adoption of telemedicine, individuals living in remote villages or areas that do not have adequate healthcare facilities can contact doctors or medical personnel located in healthcare centers. This will reduce the burden of traveling long distances and the cost required to obtain healthcare services.

Telemedicine has become one of the alternative solutions to improving access to healthcare in remote areas. This accessibility problem mainly occurs in rural areas, remote areas, or areas that are difficult to reach by public transportation. Geographical conditions and inadequate infrastructure are often factors that affect accessibility gaps in remote areas. For example, difficult road access and a lack of transportation facilities can make it difficult for patients to access health services located in the city center. This leads to many patients being underserved and ultimately delaying or even not getting the treatment they need. In some cases, even in urban areas, access to health services may be limited due to severe traffic congestion and long travel distances.

Additionally, economic factors also play a significant role in the accessibility gap for telemedicine services. Patients in remote areas may not have adequate financial resources to pay for the cost of telemedicine services (Mehrotra et al., 2017). The cost of technology and infrastructure to access services may also be higher in remote areas compared to major cities.

Efforts can be made to address this accessibility gap by expanding the reach of telemedicine services. This can be done by improving technological infrastructure in remote areas and developing health networks that are integrated with telemedicine technology (Ross et al., 2016). In addition, education and training programs can also help increase public awareness about the advantages and benefits of telemedicine services.

Meanwhile, support from the government and private sector is also important in addressing the accessibility gap. The government can provide incentives and assistance to expand the reach of telemedicine services to remote areas. Meanwhile, the private sector can assist in providing the required technology and infrastructure.

Thus, the accessibility gap is still a significant challenge in the implementation of telemedicine in remote areas. However, with the right efforts and collaboration between the government, private sector, and community, telemedicine services can be a solution to improve the accessibility and quality of health services in remote areas.

With telemedicine, patients in remote areas can easily access health services from medical personnel in big cities without having to travel far. This can improve the accessibility of health services to the same extent as the availability of services in urban areas (Khayru & Issalillah, 2022).

In addition, telemedicine also allows patients to connect with doctors or medical personnel who are more experts in a particular field. This allows patients to get a more accurate diagnosis and better treatment than if they were to rely solely on doctors or medical personnel available in remote areas.

The use of technology in telemedicine allows patients to connect with doctors and healthcare professionals remotely, even if they are located at a great distance from a healthcare center (Mehrotra et al., 2017). This is especially beneficial for patients who require regular medical care, such as those with chronic conditions or the elderly. In this case, patients do not need to spend a lot of time or money traveling to a health care center (Issalillah et al., 2021).

The use of technology in telemedicine can also help overcome the problem of a lack of adequate health facilities and resources in remote areas. Patients can receive the same healthcare services as patients in healthcare centers by using technologies such as video conferencing, text messaging, or the telephone. This allows doctors and medical personnel to provide better healthcare services even in remote and isolated areas (Sharma & Clarke, 2014).

In addition, there are also concerns about the quality of services and diagnoses provided by online doctors. The quality of service may vary depending on the skills and experience of the doctor providing the telemedicine service. In online doctor consultations, patients can talk to doctors via video conferencing or text messaging to get diagnosis, treatment, or advice on health issues (Gately et al., 2022). However, the quality of service may vary depending on the skills and experience of the doctor providing the telemedicine service.

This concern about service quality arises because, in practice, online doctor consultations cannot always provide an accurate diagnosis. In addition, sometimes online doctors do not have direct access to patients' medical records and cannot perform direct physical examinations. This can lead to a misdiagnosis and incorrect treatment.

In this case, the role of doctors in telemedicine is crucial in determining the quality of service. Physicians must ensure that they have sufficient skills and experience in providing telemedicine services. In addition, doctors must understand the limitations of technology and the ability of telemedicine to provide accurate healthcare services. Therefore, there needs to be an effort to ensure that doctors who provide telemedicine services have adequate qualifications and experience.

However, the implementation of telemedicine is also faced with a number of challenges that need to be overcome. One of them is the limited technological infrastructure in some remote areas, including slow or unstable internet access (Khoshrounejad et al., 2021). Without adequate technological infrastructure, it will be difficult to use telemedicine effectively. Patients living in remote or inland areas may not have adequate access to remote communication technologies such as the internet or telephone, making it difficult for them to access telemedicine services. Therefore, efforts need to be made to improve accessibility and equality of access for telemedicine services.

In addition, the challenges of data privacy and security are also important concerns. Medical data and personal information of patients transmitted through telemedicine platforms must be guaranteed confidentiality and protected from unauthorized access. One of the major concerns is the privacy and security of patient data. Patients must ensure that their data is safe and secure when used in telemedicine. Therefore, efforts need to be made to ensure the security of patient data in telemedicine. Concerns about patient data privacy and security in telemedicine are critical, as patients' medical and health data is highly sensitive and personal. This includes information about medical history, current health conditions, medications being received, and other personal information. If patient data is not properly protected, it can cause various problems, such as stolen patient identities, stolen medical data, and unauthorized use of medical information (Wahyudi et al., 2021). For example, there have been cases where electronically stored patient data has been the target of cyberattacks, leading to the data being stolen or used unauthorizedly. These cases show how important it is to protect the privacy and security of patient data in telemedicine. Therefore, it is important for telemedicine service providers to ensure that their systems are secure and protected against cyberattacks and data breaches.

To protect the privacy and security of patient data in telemedicine, there are several steps that must be taken. First, providers should use secure technologies and systems to store and send patient data. This includes the use of data encryption, firewalls, and security certifications. Second, providers should ensure that all staff and medical personnel involved in using the telemedicine system are trained on data security and privacy. Thirdly, patients should be given clear information on how their data will be used and protected in telemedicine.

However, while there are concerns about the privacy and security of patient data in telemedicine, there are also significant benefits to its use. Telemedicine can help reduce healthcare costs, save travel time and costs, and improve accessibility to healthcare in remote areas. Therefore, it is important to continuously improve telemedicine systems to make them safer and more accurately protected while still ensuring optimal service quality for patients and medical personnel.

In addition, the digital divide between younger generations and the elderly also needs to be addressed. Some elderly people may not be familiar with or trust the use of technology, thus requiring more intensive education and mentoring efforts to facilitate the implementation of telemedicine for this group. The implementation of telemedicine must be ensured to have an element of convenience, just like the systems that exist in every service industry (Kemarauwana & Darmawan, 2020). By ensuring ease of use of the system, it will ensure that users can reach the elderly group.

CONCLUSIONS

As such, a key advantage of telemedicine is its ability to improve access to healthcare in remote areas. Telemedicine allows patients to access healthcare remotely, allowing them to receive the same care as patients in a healthcare center. This can help improve the quality of life of patients in remote areas and the accessibility of healthcare services similar to those available in urban areas. Based on the available literature, telemedicine has been shown to be effective in improving healthcare quality, increasing healthcare accessibility, and reducing healthcare costs. However, further studies are needed to ensure the quality of services and correct the accessibility gap. This paper serves as an introduction to identifying the challenges that exist in implementing telemedicine for equitable access to healthcare in Indonesia. With a better understanding of these challenges, suitable solutions and supportive policies can be formulated to accelerate the adoption of telemedicine and realize equitable access to healthcare across Indonesia.

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