EXPLORING OLDER ADULT'S READYNESS FOR TELEMEDICINE IN ADVANCING EQUITABLE HEALTHCARE ACCESS

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Abstract

Healthcare systems have been challenged by aged population and prevalence of non-communicable diseases. Medical follow-up is a requirement of older adults who receive residential care through clinic visits. Transporting residents to health clinics is time-consuming, costly and physically demanding. Telemedicine can be treated alternative and healthcare innovation that may assure access to care minimizing logistical burdens to a care home. However, older adults' readiness to use telemedicine remains an important consideration. The aim of the study was to explore the readiness, attitudes, and willingness of older adults residing in an elderly home to utilize telemedicine services for the management of NCDs and routine healthcare consultations. A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted among 30 older adults in an elderly home, Baththaramulla. Participants were selected using purposive sampling method. They were diagnosed with one or more NCDs and attended clinics monthly. Data were collected using a structured interviewer-administered questionnaire. Awareness of telemedicine, access to digital devices, expected benefits, concerns, and willingness to engage in virtual consultations were assessed. 20% were aware of telemedicine, 70% were willing to participate in telemedicine consultations, and 60% reported concerns regarding technology use. Most respondents perceived telemedicine as an alternative for routine follow-up consultations, travel and waiting. Respondents believed that telemedicine could reduce the burden on caregivers. Challenges were identified regarding digital literacy, technology use, and the nonexistence of face-to-face interaction with healthcare professionals. 80% demonstrated willingness to participate in telemedicine consultations when caregivers were available to provide technical assistance and support for hearing, visual, speech, and other communication difficulties. Findings suggest older adults with NCDs living in residential care showed overall readiness to adopt telemedicine services. Implementing technically supported telemedicine sessions in residential care may support equitable healthcare access, reduce transportation burdens, and contribute to sustainable and person-centered healthcare delivery for ageing populations in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Digital Health, Healthcare Access, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), Older Adults, Telemedicine,