

Therapy via teleconference?

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Obtaining therapy via teleconference is just as effective as face-to-face sessions, according to a new research by Stéphane Guay, a psychiatry professor at the Université de Montréal.

"Previous studies have shown that phobia therapy via teleconferencing was just as efficient as face to face contact," says Dr. Guay, who is also director of the Trauma Studies Centre at the Louis-H. Lafontaine Hospital's Fernand-Seguin Research Centre. "We wanted to see if the process could also be used for post-traumatic stress treatment."

Until recently, telemedicine was limited to doctors using the technology to communicate with peers who would weigh-in on x-rays results or supervise a surgery. With teletherapy, patients could theoretically consult experts from the other side of the globe.

As part of this study, 17 post-traumatic stress victims from the Outaouais region underwent 16 to 25 sessions via teleconference with Montreal therapists. A control group consisted of patients receiving face-to-face therapy.

The teletherapy participants, however, still needed to visit a hospital equipped with the necessary equipment and supervised by medical personnel. "It would be ethically indefensible for them to stay home," says Dr. Guay. "Post-traumatic stress therapies require that a patient relive certain traumatic events and should they become uncomfortable it is mandatory that someone be there to intervene."

The teletherapy group and the control group equally benefited from their [therapy](#). "The same number of patients in both groups saw a significant decrease in their post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety symptoms," says Dr. Guay. "In fact, 75 to 80 percent overcame their chronic post-traumatic [stress](#)."

Patients were later evaluated and none were affected by distance to their therapist and none expressed discomfort about the technological aspects of the procedure. "In fact, comments were more in favor of teletherapy," says Dr. Guay. "It seems [patients](#) appreciate a certain distance from their therapist."

Teletherapy could be increasingly used to provide access to treatments requiring specialists who are unavailable in remote regions. While Dr. Guay says teletherapy can't be used for all types of rehabilitation, it would lend itself well to the treatment of depression, phobias and eating disorders.

Provided by University of Montreal

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