

Remote orthopaedic care may successfully, cost-effectively treat common conditions

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Orthopaedic care for patients living in remote areas may be managed through phone or email, allowing patients to receive treatment without travelling to a larger, urban hospital for care, according to a study presented today at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). The study also found that remote care may provide significant savings in time, missed work, and health care and transportation costs for residents living in rural areas.

Orthopaedic surgeons at a McGill University Health Centre in Montreal used commercial, encrypted email and phone calls to communicate with [primary care physicians](#) in six towns in the northern area of Quebec about their patients, who primarily suffered from bone fractures, injuries which typically require travel to a larger hospital for care. The towns are part of a geographic area surrounding the hospital which spans 375,291 square miles (972,000 square kilometers), including areas where medical services are extremely limited.

The retrospective study, using data from January 2008 to June 2013, found that out of 921 email consults, 731 patients were able to receive treatment from their local doctor with the guidance of an [orthopaedic surgeon](#) at McGill.

"These results show that you don't need an expensive, elaborate system to clinically manage patients with more common conditions," said Adam Cota, MD, lead study author and now an orthopaedic trauma fellow at OrthoIndy at St. Vincent Indianapolis.

Researchers used a basic email system, requiring virtually no start-up costs or dedicated personnel. In contrast, sophisticated telehealth communication systems have higher operating costs. Dr. Cota noted that the [email](#) application meets Canada's requirements for protecting patient information.

For patients, receiving proper orthopaedic treatment and care near their home eliminates the need to travel, take time off from work, or pay for child care and other related expenses. In addition, the study estimated a savings of nearly \$3.7 million (\$5.5 million in Canadian dollars) over the study timeframe in medical transportation, which in Canada, is provided free of charge from [rural areas](#).

"We feel that these results will be important for planning and enhancing delivery of orthopaedic care in remote communities," said Dr. Cota, "and a low-cost referral system like this can result in significant savings by the patient and/or insurance or government provider."

Provided by American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

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