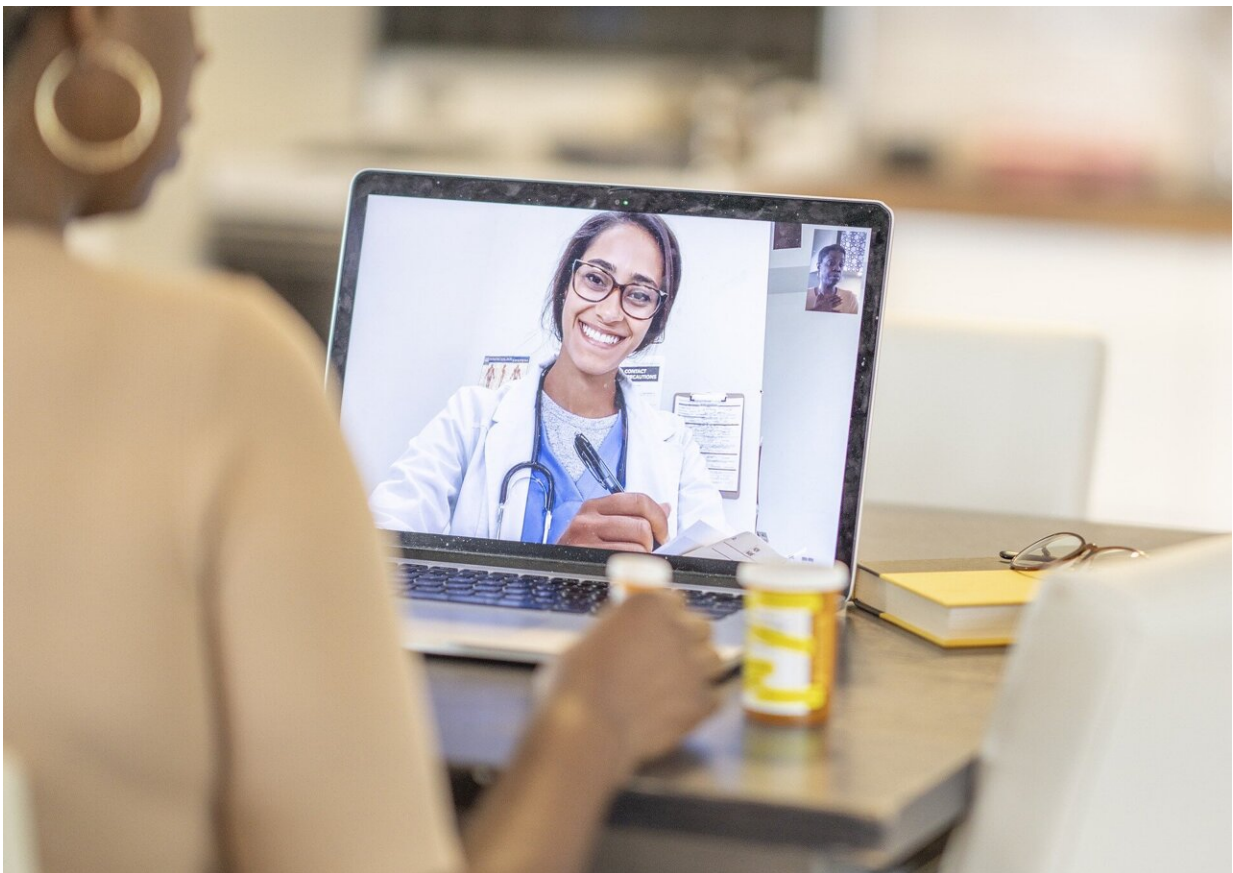


# Greater understanding and acceptance of virtual doctor appointments prompted by pandemic

August 26 2021, by David Bradley

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Many people do not have access to good-quality healthcare provision

either because of the limited availability of resources or the distances involved in traveling to and from healthcare centers. A review in the International Journal Electronic Healthcare has considered the state-of-the-art in internet and communications technology in this context and how consultations with a physician might be carried out virtually rather than face-to-face to revolutionize access for millions of people in the developing world and in poor settings.

Gopireddy Murali Mohan Reddy and Priyanka Gollapalli of Evidencian Research Associates, Srinivas Gunda and Prasad Kompalli of Novocura Tech Health Services, all based in Bangalore, India, have surveyed the peer-reviewed scientific literature concerning virtual [healthcare](#) models and present a critique for all stakeholders in their paper.

The idea of a virtual consultation with one's physician or other healthcare worker is not a novel concept, phone consultations and even video calls have been used for many years. What has changed, perhaps driven by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing and other [safety measures](#) to counter this viral disease, is there is now significantly more widespread understanding and acceptance of the requisite technology.

Universal health coverage by 2030 was an ambitious goal embodied in the global priorities as part of our sustainable development goals around the world. However, half of the world's population still has only [poor access](#) to essential health services if any at all. The World Health Organisation reiterated this goal in a statement in 2019 demanding "universal health coverage for everyone, everywhere."

Unfortunately, the poverty gap between nations and within nations seems to be scuppering those plans and that goal remains in some ways as distant today as it seemed when it was first stated, despite the WHO's aspirations...with one caveat—the virtualisation of medical services that

might offer healthcare provision given access to technology even if direct access to healthcare workers is not possible.

The advent of the internet and ability to digitally transfer various kinds of information has opened the door for telemedicine and e-health, the team writes. The increasing availability of mobile phones and high-speed internet access allows the real-time transfer of audio, video, images, and other information. Personalized healthcare access in the form of a virtual consultation with one's physician or other clinician is now possible for many people and that access is growing as the technology becomes more widely available.

The team's review of the state-of-the-art in this area draws from them an optimistic perspective—it would not be imprudent to suggest a [digital revolution](#) in healthcare is about to make important changes the world over, they suggest. In light of this optimism, the team suggests that now is the time for those running the healthcare systems and the technologists to work together to maximize adoption and address the challenges rather than dithering about whether it should be done or not. Moreover, now is the time for tests and trials to be carried out to ensure safety and privacy are exemplary for the ultimate benefit of the patient.

**More information:** Gopireddy Murali Mohan Reddy et al, Virtual doctor consultation, potential to revolutionise healthcare access in resource poor settings: opportunities and challenges, *International Journal of Electronic Healthcare* (2021). [DOI: 10.1504/IJEH.2021.117126](#)

Provided by Inderscience

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pandemic (2021, August 26) retrieved 10 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-08-greater-virtual-doctor-prompted-pandemic.html>

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