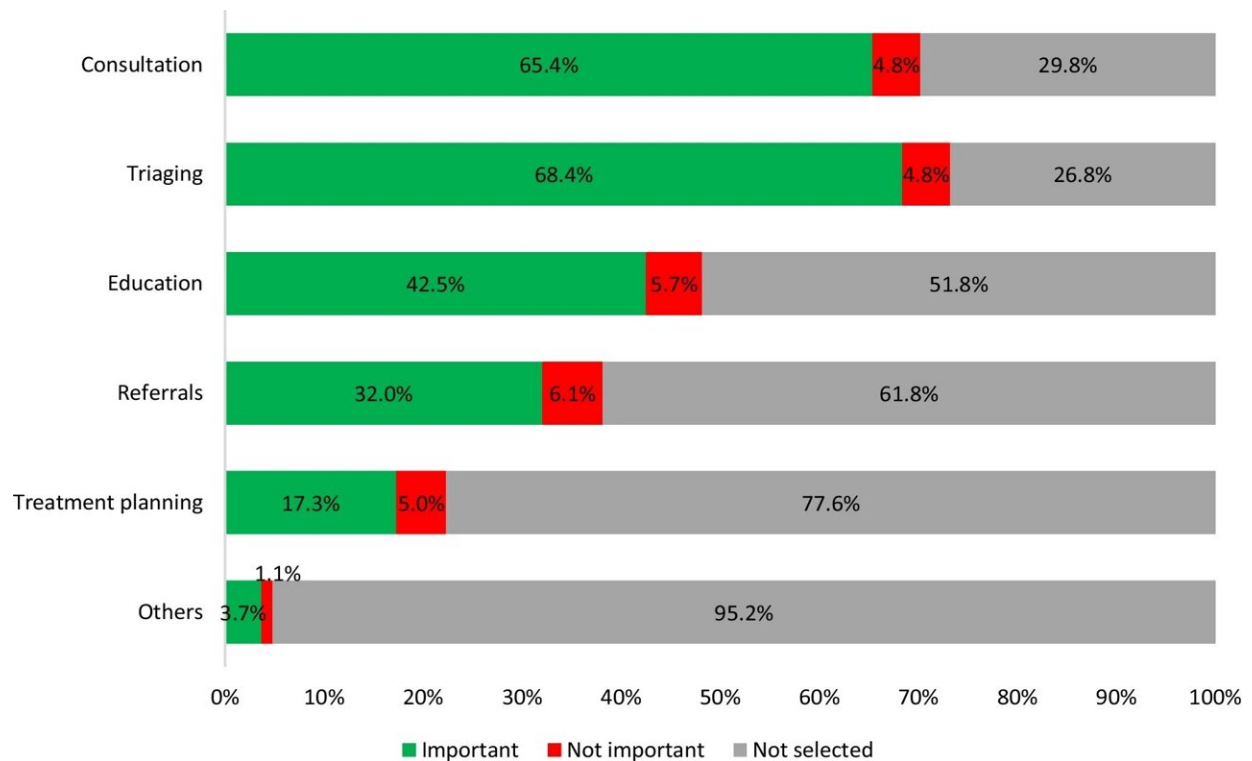


# Exploring the impact of teledentistry on kids' wellness

March 9 2023, by Prabhjot Sohal



Views on the usefulness of teledentistry in clinical settings. The participant's ranking of procedures where teledentistry could be useful in clinical practice is shown in Fig. 1. Most participants (68.4%) considered patient triaging an important use for teledentistry in clinical practice followed by consultation (65.4%), educational purposes (42.5%), referrals (32.0%), treatment planning (17.3%) and others (3.7%). Procedures noted within the 'other' category included emergency treatment (2.0%), follow-up care (1.3%), rapport building (0.4%). Credit: *BMC Oral Health* (2023). DOI: 10.1186/s12903-023-02772-y

While the COVID-19 pandemic upended everything in the world, it also became a powerful catalyst for innovations that made remote delivery of health care and services—including dentistry—possible.

A new study by Western researchers Rocco Cheuk, a third-year undergraduate student at Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, and Dr. Abbas Jessani has shown almost 50 percent of dentists in Ontario used some form of teledentistry—a combination of dentistry, telephone and virtual communication—to provide remote care to [patients](#) during the pandemic. The study also found dentists were held back from using teledentistry because of their lack of interest in it, and in many cases, lack of resources.

"Remote [dental care](#) is a real need. It has been beneficial, especially in expediting consultations and triaging patients for treatments and follow-ups. Not many [dental professionals](#) were incorporating it into their practice, but the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in [dental clinics](#) compelled them to look for creative ways to serve the needs of patients while keeping everyone safe," said Jessani, professor at Schulich Dentistry.

From the perspective of a dental practice, teledentistry serves two primary purposes: facilitating live consultations between a dental practitioner and their patient through video conferencing technology; and enabling remote sharing of monitored clinical information, radiographs, laboratory test results and similar data.

However, the benefits teledentistry can offer vulnerable patients, such as seniors, patients with disabilities, and marginalized and underprivileged populations, are what should compel dental professionals to use and integrate it as a part of routine care, added Jessani.

"Teledentistry can lessen the barriers people face in accessing dental

care. At times, patients and their caregivers have to take unpaid time off work, because a visit to a [dental clinic](#) can take up the whole day, especially if they are relying on public transport or if a dental office is not conveniently located. Incorporating everyday technology in the provision of dental care can significantly reduce disparities in oral health care among rural and urban communities," said Jessani, adding dental professionals need to look beyond the clinical setting and deliver services to those who need them the most.

The study, published in *BMC Oral Health*, was based on a Schulich Dentistry Research Opportunity Program (SDROP) project undertaken by Cheuk and supervised by Jessani. The study included a survey of 456 dental professionals in Ontario, recording their perceptions towards the use of teledentistry and analyzing factors that influenced clinical practices during COVID-19 lockdowns.

The study found only 49 percent of study respondents reported using teledentistry, with 13 percent using it before the pandemic and 36 percent adopting it during the pandemic. Almost 54 percent reported a lack of interest as the most common reason for not using teledentistry.

The study also found that female dental professionals, those working in private practices, and those who worked in a single dental office were more likely to adopt teledentistry during the pandemic. The surveyed dental professionals also said teledentistry was an effective tool for educating patients about oral health and dental treatments.

Stating the benefits of teledentistry and the barriers against it, the study recommends the next step is to improve its uptake among dental professionals and private practices. Jessani said that dental practitioners can be encouraged to use teledentistry if they are shown that basic remote care is possible using simple and affordable technology like a mobile phone camera. The study also recommends developing a robust

curriculum that integrates technology and teledentistry in clinical care.

"Including teledentistry training in a dental school's curriculum could be a good starting point," said Jessani, who is also assistant director for curriculum renewal and service learning at Schulich Dentistry.

**More information:** Rocco Cheuk et al, Teledentistry use during the COVID-19 pandemic: perceptions and practices of Ontario dentists, *BMC Oral Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12903-023-02772-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12903-023-02772-y)

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