



Health workers want to continue with digital patient treatment

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Health workers in Norway experienced that video meetings worked well in communication with both patients and partners.

Infection control restrictions due to the corona pandemic, led to reduced opportunities for traditional follow-ups. Health personnel in primary care and hospitals had to mainly communicate digitally by phone and video.

Although the technology was challenging and they had little experience with video conferencing in clinical practice, most health professionals were impressed by how well they did.

They emphasized that although video conferencing worked well, the channel was best suited to follow up on already known patients and to coordinate measures for the patient between, for example, hospitals, GPs and physiotherapists.

Physical contact is however still necessary to enable comprehensive clinical assessment and diagnosis of people.

Patient-centred health service teams

Since 2014, the University Hospital of Northern Norway has had a patient-centred health service team, where people from the hospital and the municipal health services collaborates.

The goal is better collaboration across the organization to achieve a patient-centred, holistic, and proactive health service. Digital interaction is recognized as an important tool, but was only tried to a limited extent before the pandemic struck.

About the project

Patients, authorities and professionals express a great need for a radical change in health services for patients with long-term and complex needs.

The project Dignity Care supports the development of a safe comprehensive health and care service for these patients.

The project is led by Professor Gro Berntsen at the Norwegian Centre for E-health Research.

The researchers conducted video interviews with 19 people with a health professional background, to evaluate if follow-up of elderly patients with complex needs can be performed through digital collaboration, and what the health workers thought about it. They investigated how they used video consultations at hospitals in Tromsø, Narvik and Harstad and in three municipalities.

Reduces tiring journeys

The health-workers explained that the goal is to make the disease as unobtrusive as possible for the patient's everyday life. Videoconsultation may contribute to this, by follow-up taking place on video from home or from a local GP office. It saves the patient many tiring trips to the hospital.

Another experience the informants gained was that when collaboration meetings were done on video, the participants were often well prepared. They were able to discuss and resolve issues faster than in a physical meeting.



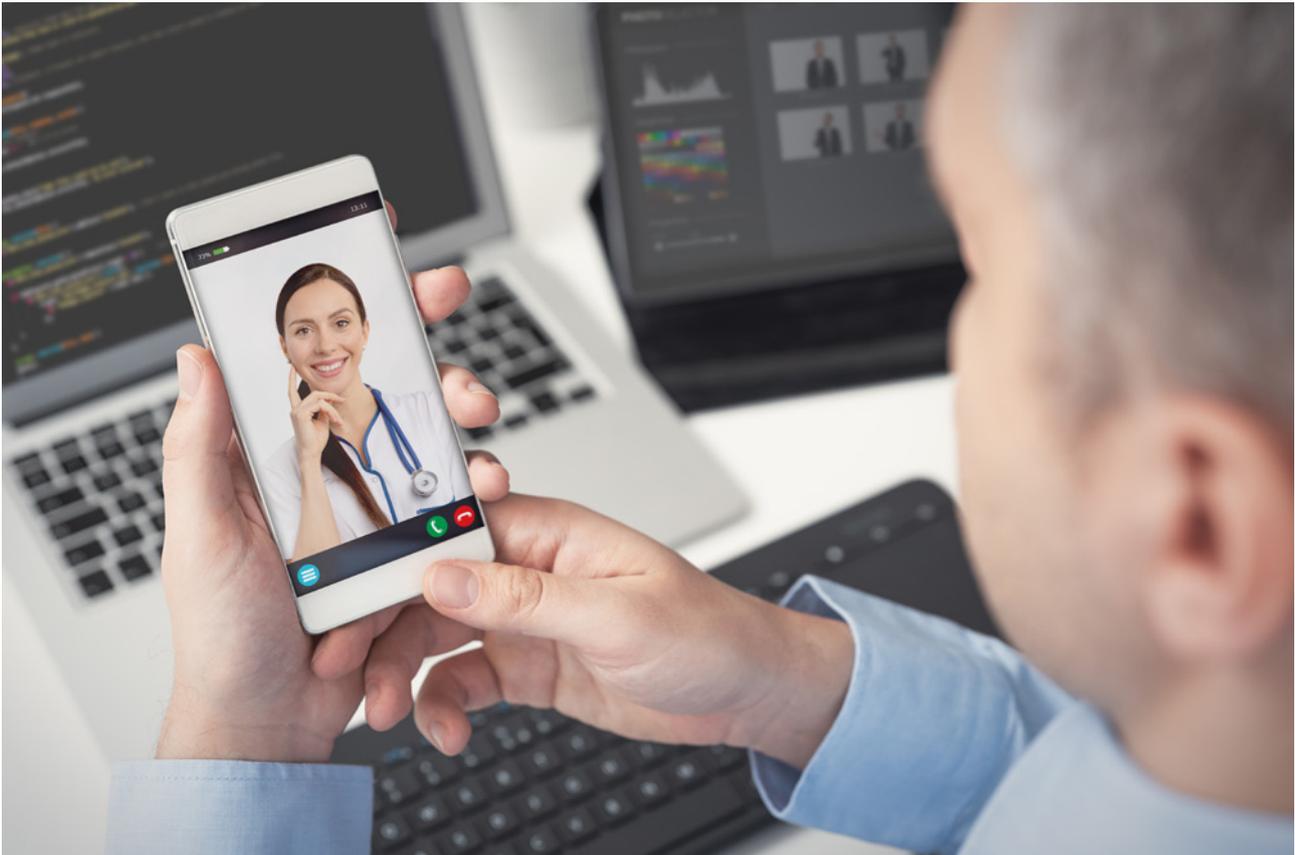


Photo: Colourbox.

More actors had the opportunity to participate in meetings, such as the GP, home care service or the specialist from the hospital when they did not have to travel to the hospital. They also learned that video meetings were intense and demanding for the participants and should last for a maximum of one hour.

Need a strategy

Despite a steep learning curve, health workers want to continue with digital communication, and including it stepwise to the daily healthcare services.

Many informants outlined the importance of designing an overall strategy for the use and support of video technology. This strategy does not exist today, but the researchers believe it must be in place for this to become an integral part of the health service.

Their findings show that digital collaboration is a simple, cheap and effective step towards better information exchange in the health service. It can help solve the need for communication and exchange of health data between all stakeholders.

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