

The Impact of Virtual Care in Saskatchewan during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review of Local Research

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INTRODUCTION

- The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid shift from face-to-face interactions in healthcare delivery to virtual care (VC).
- Our study identifies the impacts of VC uptake during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saskatchewan, exploring its influence on patient/health care provider outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions guiding our study were:

- How did VC impact healthcare delivery in Saskatchewan?
- What was the experience of family medicine residents with the learning and implementation of VC?
- What were the barriers/disadvantages and facilitators/advantages of VC during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What were recommendations and opportunities for change beyond the pandemic?

METHODS

Ethical considerations

- Ethics exemption was granted for this study (Bio # 3346)

Study Design

- Rapid review and synthesis

Methods

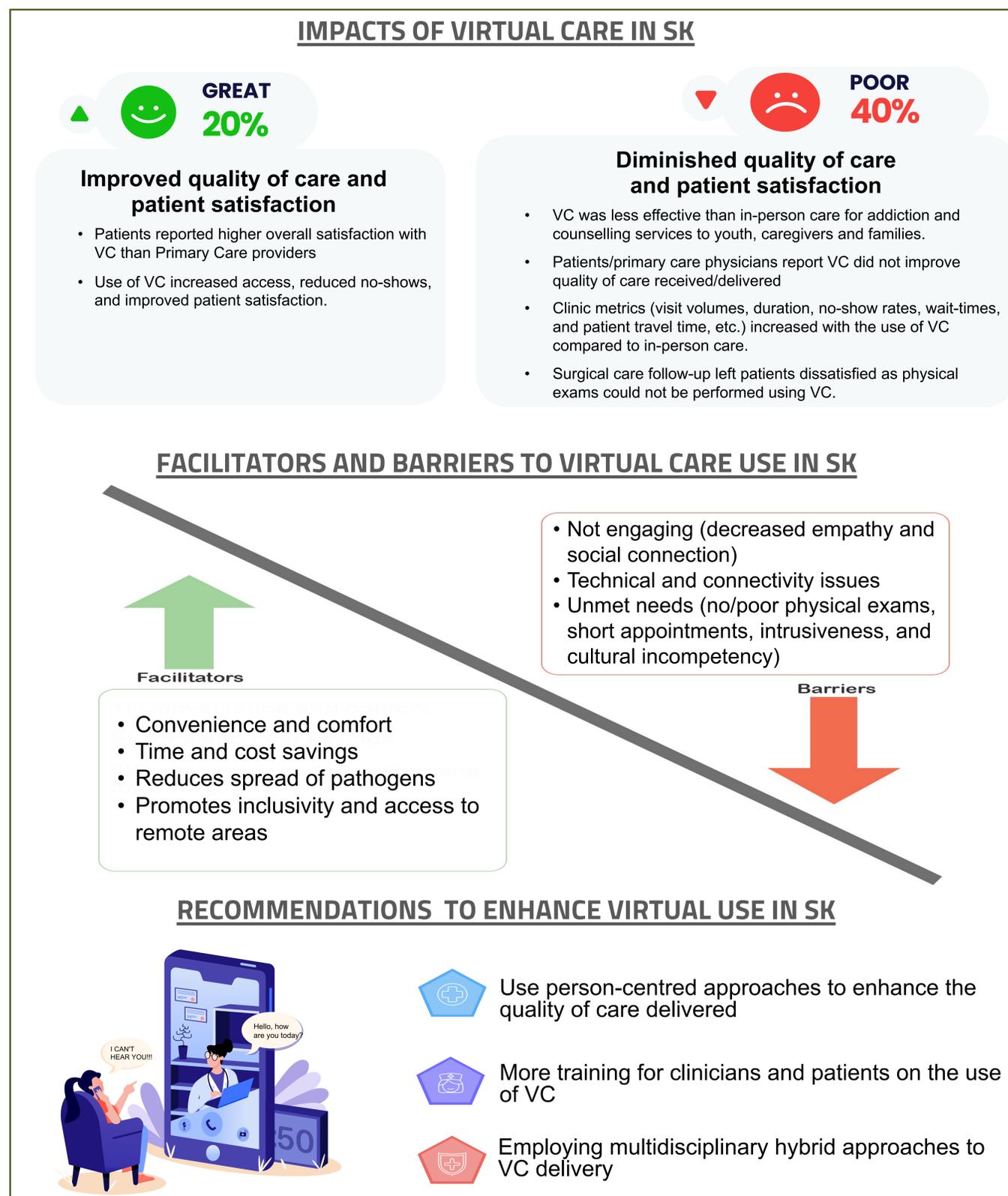
- A systematic approach was used to source and gather data/literature published in SK on VC.
- We searched for peer-reviewed literature, pre-prints, abstracts, conference papers, technical reports and grey literature published from March 20, 2020, to April 30, 2022.
- The following specific keywords were used: virtual care, COVID-19, Saskatchewan.
- Next, we reached out directly to researchers, clinicians, and health professional bodies to inquire and retrieve research projects on VC during the pandemic in SK.

Data Analysis

- Data were analysed thematically and descriptively for content.

RESULTS

- Ten studies were included in this review. Results are summarized by content and thematic findings.



DISCUSSION

- The impact of VC during the pandemic showed mixed responses with regards to patient/student/ clinician satisfaction and quality of care delivered.
- Our study showed that VC should be used in the appropriate clinical/teaching contexts; however, should not replace face-to-face interactions.
- Interestingly, 73% family medicine residents were satisfied with the implementation of VC in the province, with 100% of them indicating interest to implement VC in their practice.
- The barriers from our study provides opportunities for exploring future directions for enhancing the use of VC in SK.
- For example, the SK government could invest in reliable and robust infrastructure that support VC by creating cost-effective solutions to accessing higher bandwidth options through partnerships with SaskTel or other telecommunication partnerships.

CONCLUSIONS

- The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to adapt healthcare delivery models.
- Our study showed there are opportunities for innovation using VC delivery that overcome barriers and engage patients/clinicians in a manner that may enhances quality VC delivery.

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