Improving the Telehealth Education Curriculum – A Delphi

Rhone, Kelly MD; Sidel, Kristi MHA, BSN

Background

As national interest in telehealth grows, there is an opportunity to support education. The meaning and usage of telehealth has varied among specialties and the body of literature in the field is relatively new. As medical education has driven towards a model of standardization and competency-based curricula, the same must occur for telemedicine.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced even reluctant practitioners to adopt to revolutionary technologies required to reach their patients. However, training in the usage of telemedicine services varies by institution for new graduates and there is little guidance for existing practitioners desiring to adopt these practices.

To date, the United States has no accepted board of telemedicine or accredited training programs in the field. Having identified the need for improved guidance for practitioners, this study aims to develop a consensus agreement among telemedicine experts on a curriculum for post-graduate medical training in telemedicine.

Objectives

To date, there has been no gold standard curriculum for telehealth education. A formal curriculum is needed in the field of telehealth. The Delphi methodology has been used to develop a consensus-driven curriculum for medical training in a variety of fields. We sought to create an expert driven consensus curriculum in telehealth using a modified Delphi methodology and present the results in a published manuscript.

Methods

A Modified Delphi was used to systematically define competencies for use in telehealth curricula. This included a methodical review of the literature to create an initial set of competencies, which were analyzed and edited by a focus group of experts. Then distributed as a series of 3 rounds of surveys to a group of 23 experts. Competencies which obtained a score of 4.0 or greater on a 5-point Likert scale in at least 2 rounds of survey were included in the final recommended curriculum.

Results

For the literature review portion, 6,966 individual articles were screened by title and abstract. 200 were identified as meeting inclusion criteria and were reviewed. Of the reviewed articles, 154 were found to be relevant to the topic of telemedicine education. 55 items were extracted as proposed elements of a consensus curriculum to be included in the initial focus group.

Based on the focus group recommendation, 32 items were added for a total of 87 curriculum items in the initial survey. The expert panel of 23 was surveyed, 14 of whom completed all rounds of the study. This resulted in six additional competencies being added. After three rounds of the survey, expert consensus on the curriculum created a list of 34 competencies. The most prevalent competency of medical education was Systems-based practice with 10.

Conclusion

There is an urgency to develop gold standard telehealth educational standards. This curriculum provides an educational pathway for healthcare professionals (new and established) in the United States and globally seeking core fundamentals in the use of telehealth services and provides a benchmark for institutions providing such education. Potential topics of research would include studying the outcomes of the educational process of institutions implementing these recommendations.

Collaboration

Partnership with organizations, associations and health systems to maximize expertise in creating content valid with evidence based practice is an opportunity for collaboration with colleagues. By creating telehealth competencies and education, we focus not on our own success, but on how our examples will spark the success of the industry as a whole. Our goal is to weave telehealth into the fabric of healthcare delivery across the country as a vital tool in promoting access to quality care.

Delphi Panel Members | Affiliation
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Richard Bakalar, MD | ViTel Net
Robert Darling, MD | Patronus Medical Corporation
Bill England, Ph.D., J.D. | Office for Advancement of Telehealth
Judd Hollander, MD | Thomas Jefferson University
Deanna Larson, RN | Avera eCARE
James McElligott, MD | Medical University of South Carolina
Joseph McMenamin, MD | McMenamin Law Offices
Oren Mechanic, MD | Harvard Medical Faculty Physicians
Karen S. Rheuban, MD | University of Virginia
Kelly Rhone, MD | Avera eCARE
Roy Schoenberg | Am Well
Matthew Stanley, DO | Avera Health
Andrew Watson, MD | UPMC
Moderators
Ritu Sarin, MD | Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Gregory Ciottone, MD | World Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine

Panel Members

- Avera Health
- Office for Advancement of Telehealth
- Medical University of South Carolina
- University of Virginia
- Am Well
- Avera Health
- UPMC
- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- World Association of Disaster and Emergency Medicine