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Abstract

We carried out a pilot study comparing satisfaction levels between psychiatric patients seen face to face (FTF) and those seen via videoconference. Patients who consented were randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group received services in person (FTF from the visiting psychiatrist) while the other was seen using videoconferencing at 128 kbit/s. One psychiatrist provided all the FTF and videoconferencing assessment and follow-up visits. A total of 24 subjects were recruited. Three of the subjects (13%) did not attend their appointments and two subjects in each group were lost to follow-up. Thus there were nine in the FTF group and eight in the videoconferencing group. The two groups were similar in most respects. Patient satisfaction with the services was assessed using the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8), completed four months after the initial consultation. The mean scores were 25.3 in the FTF group and 21.6 in the videoconferencing group. Although there was a trend in favour of the FTF service, the difference was not significant. Patient satisfaction is only one component of evaluation. The efficacy of telepsychiatry must also be measured relative to that of conventional, FTF care before policy makers can decide how extensively telepsychiatry should be implemented.