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RESPONSE TO LETTER

Healthcare Providers' Experience with Saudi Arabia's 937 Virtual Medical Call Centers and Telehealth [Response to Letter]

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Dear editor

We appreciate the insightful comments and suggestions provided by Fuad Husain Akbar and Hasta Handayani Idrus regarding our study on healthcare providers' experience with Saudi Arabia's 937 Virtual Medical Call Centers and telehealth.[1] We are pleased to receive feedback that acknowledges the importance of our findings and offers constructive recommendations for enhancing telehealth services.

First, we acknowledge the recommendation to include additional questions in the survey that measure patient and doctor demographic data, experience with telehealth systems, and the quality of IT support. Indeed, capturing detailed demographic data could provide deeper insights into the variations in satisfaction and usage patterns across different segments of the population. We agree that such data can help tailor telehealth services to better meet the needs of diverse patient groups. However, the primary focus of our initial study was to provide a broad overview of healthcare providers' experiences and to identify general trends and challenges. Adding detailed demographic questions in future surveys is a valuable suggestion, and we plan to incorporate these elements to enhance the comprehensiveness of our data collection.

We appreciate the suggestion to assess the level of training and IT support available to healthcare providers. Our study identified the need for ongoing support and updates, but a more granular analysis of training needs and IT infrastructure could further inform targeted interventions. While we recognize the importance of this aspect, the scope of our initial survey was limited by time and resource constraints. We agree that a deeper dive into these areas is necessary, and we will explore this aspect in our future research to ensure healthcare providers are adequately supported in their use of telehealth technologies.

Regarding the socio-economic factors and internet access, we fully agree that these are critical determinants of the effectiveness of telehealth services. Our findings highlighted challenges faced by patients without reliable internet access, which underscores the need for strategies to bridge this digital divide. We are advocating for policies that enhance internet accessibility and affordability, particularly in underserved regions. Nevertheless, the focus of our study was on the healthcare providers' perspectives, and we believe a separate, dedicated study on patient access issues would be more appropriate to fully address these concerns.

We also recognize the importance of cost and insurance coverage for telehealth services.[2] Our study found that while telehealth is perceived as cost-effective, patients face challenges in obtaining insurance coverage. We recommend that healthcare policymakers work towards integrating telehealth services into standard insurance packages to alleviate this burden on patients.[3–5] This area was not explored in depth in our study due to its focus on providers rather than patients, but it is an important area for future research and policy development.

Ensuring high-quality video and audio during teleconsultations is essential for the effectiveness of telehealth. We concur with the suggestion to improve network stability and technical quality. In our study, we acknowledged these

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technical challenges but did not delve deeply into potential solutions due to the study's scope. We are now exploring collaborations with telecom providers to enhance the infrastructure supporting telehealth services, recognizing that this is a crucial area for improvement.

We appreciate the thoughtful feedback provided by Akbar and Idrus. Their recommendations align with our goal of continuously improving telehealth services to better meet the needs of healthcare providers and patients. While we acknowledge some limitations in our initial study, we are committed to incorporating these suggestions into our future research and advocacy efforts to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and satisfaction with telehealth services in Saudi Arabia.

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in this constructive dialogue. We are confident that through continued collaboration and feedback, we can significantly advance telehealth services for the betterment of healthcare delivery in Saudi Arabia.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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