

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

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Concurrent Stream: Rural Health Journeys

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Abstract Title: Using a Time and Motion Study to Assess the Efficiency of Telehealth Services

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Background: Telehealth services are about improving access and supporting patient-centred care in the right place, at the right time, and come in many different forms. There is significant funding invested to support and sustain telehealth services from model and program development to infrastructure and workforce. While there is increasing evidence that telehealth services are an effective mode for providing needed healthcare which complements face-to-face services, there is a gap in our evidence-base for them. There is a need to evaluate the efficiency and capacity of telehealth services. Are they value for money?

Approach: Previous studies of a telepsychiatry program (the Mental Health Emergency Care-Rural Access Program or MHEC-RAP) have demonstrated improved access, use, and effectiveness of the service. A time and motion study analysis was combined with an observational study of that telepsychiatry program to assess the balance between program responsiveness and efficiency.

Outcomes / Results: This program is a practical telehealth solution for improving access to specialist emergency mental health care and was the basis for replicating this service with similar telepsychiatry centres across rural NSW. The findings from the time and motion study suggested that the telepsychiatry program had the capacity to manage increased activity within the current program structure and design without experiencing loss to responsiveness or provision of care which could inform program modifications and enhance the program's value for money.

Take Home Message: With the increasing use and application for telehealth services, we need to be vigilant to evaluate and ensure these services are both effective and efficient. Using a time and motion study design within our research strategies may help to improve future evaluations of telehealth services by also demonstrating their value for money.

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