

Use mobile devices for remote healthcare consultations, say experts

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NEW DELHI, JUNE 18 (India Science Wire): Health workers should be encouraged to use mobile devices to initiate remote consultation calls with patients and coordinate continuum of care for those with chronic conditions. To facilitate this, policies and protocols should be in place to explain what can and cannot be done through remote consultations and to clarify the liability issues of health workers using mobile devices.

In their latest policy brief, the George Institute for Global Health India has summarized barriers and enablers on the use of m-health for delivering primary health care services by health workers in the context of COVID-19. The report is a part of the 'Ensuring Health Systems Capacity for COVID-19 and Beyond Evidence Series'.

"The series aims to provide high quality and contextualised evidence from systematic reviews or rapid evidence synthesis to work on the opportunity the COVID-19 scenario offers and to build a strong, resilient and equitable health system in India and other low- and middle-income countries," says Soumyadeep Bhaumik, Research Fellow, The George Institute India

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India, had released a guidance note, which identified the use of telehealth platforms to deliver essential medical services for non-COVID health conditions. The WHO guideline on digital interventions for health system strengthening recognizes Mobile Health (mHealth) as an effective means to support such service delivery. It minimizes patient-provider contact, thus ensuring physical distancing. mHealth involves the use of mobile devices such as smartphones, patient-monitoring devices, personal digital assistants, and tablets to support public healthcare practices.

The policy brief provides a summary of evidence from two high-quality systematic reviews and the WHO guideline recommendations on digital health interventions. "It could be used effectively by healthcare workers to deliver health services to patients remotely and improve overall communication with co-workers, patients and decision makers. It is important to also outline challenges and enabling factors to adoption of mHealth for delivering healthcare services from health workers' perspective," says Oommen John, Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute India, and a member of the WHO Digital Health Guidelines Development Group.

A standardized mHealth training package that covers the generic aspects of use of mobile devices and good data practices should be developed to appropriately train and mentor health workers on the correct use of mobile devices. The package should include the provision of learning and training content via mobile devices to complement traditional methods of delivering continued health education and post-certification training. (India Science Wire)

Keywords: George Institute for Global Health, remote health consultation, WHO, MoHFW, Mobile Health (mHealth)