Challenges and Success Factors of Integrating Telehealth into Routine Care – A Case Study of Tele-Endocrinology Clinic in Queensland, Australia

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Aims: Telemedicine has been shown to be a feasible and effective vehicle for health care delivery in many research studies, but its uptake has been slow and fragmented. It is evident that a low proportion of telemedicine ventures survive beyond the pilot (funded) stage. However, the tele-endocrinology service in Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, Queensland, that was introduced in 2010 is one of instances that has well-integrated into the routine care. The aim of this qualitative study was to identify the challenges for introduction of this service in 2010, and success factors that enabled this service to sustain.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the consultants, nurses, coordinator, and director of Diabetes and Endocrinology department at the PA Hospital where the service is operating. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis technique.

Results: The main challenges to the adoption of the service included resistance to change, uncertainty towards continuity of the service, loyalty to previously established services and distrust to the provider organisation. The most important success factors were existing reliable infrastructure, executive and technical support, economic justification of the service, patient satisfaction, and enthusiasm of the clinicians and staff. Adopting a scalable service model, central coordination and proactive follow-up of the service were among the strategies that warranted the sustainability of the service from managerial point of view.

Conclusion: Parallel implementation and gradual substitution to the already operating outreach service, as well as targeting remote sites with fresh staff and cities with no established alternative service were notable factors that enabled rapid adoption of the telemedicine service. The enablers and barriers to adoption and sustainability of the tele-endocrinology service discussed in this paper can inform and inspire health care managers towards successful implementation strategy for future telemedicine services.

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