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REVIEW ARTICLE
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TELEPHARMACY AND VIRTUAL CARE: TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE DELIVERY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

NARENDER BOGGULA

Associate Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry & Analysis, Omega College of Pharmacy (A), Edulabad, Ghatkesar, Hyderabad, Telangana, India - 501301.

Corresponding Author
Dr. Narender Boggula

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ABSTRACT

Telepharmacy and virtual care have rapidly emerged as essential components of modern healthcare systems, fundamentally transforming the delivery of pharmaceutical and clinical services through digital technologies. Telepharmacy refers to the remote provision of pharmaceutical care using telecommunications, electronic health systems, and digital platforms, while virtual care encompasses broader healthcare services including telemedicine, remote patient monitoring, online consultations, and digital therapeutic interventions. These innovations have significantly improved healthcare accessibility, particularly in rural, underserved, and geographically isolated communities where shortages of healthcare professionals remain a persistent challenge. The global expansion of digital healthcare accelerated substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of remote healthcare models in ensuring continuity of patient care while minimizing infection risks. Technological advancements including electronic health records, cloud computing, wearable devices, mobile health applications, artificial intelligence, and secure communication platforms have enhanced the effectiveness of telepharmacy and virtual healthcare services. Studies demonstrate improvements in medication adherence, chronic disease management, patient engagement, and healthcare efficiency through remote care interventions. Telepharmacy also supports medication therapy management, prescription verification, patient counseling, and pharmacovigilance services, reducing medication-related complications and healthcare costs. Despite these benefits, implementation challenges persist, including cyber security concerns, reimbursement limitations, regulatory inconsistencies, infrastructure disparities, and digital literacy barriers among healthcare providers and patients. Ethical concerns related to confidentiality, informed consent, and equitable healthcare access also require careful consideration. This manuscript explores the evolution, technologies, applications, benefits, limitations, ethical concerns, and future prospects of telepharmacy and virtual care. It further evaluates the growing role of artificial intelligence, digital therapeutics, and remote monitoring systems in shaping future healthcare ecosystems and promoting patient-centered healthcare delivery worldwide.

Keywords: *Telepharmacy, Virtual care, Telemedicine, Digital healthcare, Medication therapy management, Remote patient monitoring, Artificial intelligence.*

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare delivery has undergone profound transformation over the past two decades due to rapid advancements in information technology, telecommunications, and digital health systems. Traditional healthcare models heavily relied on in-person consultations and facility-based care, often limiting access for individuals residing in remote or underserved areas. Increasing healthcare demands, workforce shortages, rising chronic disease prevalence, and escalating healthcare costs created an urgent need for innovative healthcare delivery approaches [1]. Telepharmacy and virtual care emerged as practical solutions capable of improving healthcare accessibility, enhancing efficiency, and supporting continuity of care.

Telepharmacy refers to the delivery of pharmaceutical services through telecommunication technologies, allowing pharmacists to provide medication-related care remotely [2]. Services include medication counseling, prescription verification, medication therapy management, therapeutic monitoring, refill authorization, and patient education. Virtual care encompasses a broader healthcare framework integrating telemedicine, remote patient monitoring, digital consultations, electronic health records, and mobile health technologies [3]. These systems facilitate healthcare delivery beyond conventional clinical environments.

The adoption of telehealth technologies accelerated dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare organizations worldwide implemented virtual consultation platforms to reduce physical contact and prevent healthcare disruption [4,5]. Regulatory agencies temporarily relaxed telehealth restrictions and expanded reimbursement policies, facilitating rapid integration of remote healthcare services [6,7]. Consequently, telepharmacy and telemedicine became central components of healthcare infrastructure.

Advancements in wearable technologies, artificial intelligence, cloud-based systems, and mobile applications have significantly improved virtual healthcare capabilities. Healthcare professionals can now remotely monitor physiological parameters, manage chronic diseases, identify medication interactions, and provide individualized therapeutic interventions [8,9]. Patients benefit from increased convenience, reduced travel requirements, improved medication adherence, and enhanced engagement in healthcare management.

Despite remarkable progress, telepharmacy and virtual care continue to face several challenges, including technological disparities, cybersecurity threats, ethical concerns, regulatory complexities, and limited digital literacy [10]. Addressing these barriers is essential for ensuring sustainable implementation and equitable healthcare access.

This article comprehensively reviews the evolution, technologies, applications, advantages, challenges, ethical implications, and future directions of telepharmacy and virtual care within modern healthcare systems.

BODY OF THE ARTICLE

1. Historical Evolution of Telepharmacy and Virtual Care

Telepharmacy originated in response to healthcare disparities affecting rural and medically underserved populations. Early initiatives focused primarily on telephone-based pharmaceutical counseling and remote prescription review systems [11]. During the 1990s, the increasing availability of internet connectivity and digital communication systems enabled healthcare organizations to expand telepharmacy services.

Virtual care evolved simultaneously through telemedicine programs developed to connect specialists with patients in geographically isolated communities [12,13]. Initial systems utilized videoconferencing technologies to provide remote consultations. As broadband infrastructure improved, virtual healthcare systems became increasingly sophisticated.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a major turning point in telehealth adoption. Global lockdowns, infection-control protocols, and healthcare workforce pressures accelerated widespread implementation of telepharmacy and virtual healthcare systems [14,15]. Healthcare institutions rapidly transitioned toward digital healthcare platforms for patient consultations, chronic disease management, prescription services, and follow-up care.

Major Milestones in Digital Healthcare Evolution

- Development of telephone-based pharmacy counseling
- Introduction of electronic prescribing systems
- Expansion of telemedicine consultation networks
- Integration of electronic health records
- Adoption of cloud-based healthcare platforms
- AI-assisted medication management systems
- Widespread telehealth expansion during COVID-19.

Today, telepharmacy and virtual care are integrated into advanced digital ecosystems combining artificial intelligence, remote monitoring devices, wearable sensors, and predictive analytics [16,17].

2. CORE COMPONENTS OF TELEPHARMACY

2.1 Medication Therapy Management (MTM)

Medication therapy management involves systematic evaluation of patient medications to improve therapeutic outcomes and reduce adverse drug events [18]. Through telepharmacy platforms, pharmacists remotely assess medication regimens, identify drug interactions, and optimize treatment plans.

Key MTM Functions

- Medication reconciliation
- Drug interaction screening
- Adherence assessment
- Therapeutic optimization
- Patient counseling

Studies demonstrate that pharmacist-led MTM programs significantly improve chronic disease control and reduce hospital readmission rates [19].

2.2 Remote Prescription Verification

Telepharmacy systems allow pharmacists to review and verify prescriptions remotely using secure digital platforms. Automated dispensing systems further enhance medication safety by minimizing dispensing errors [20].

2.3 Patient Counseling Services

Video conferencing and mobile communication platforms facilitate real-time counseling sessions between pharmacists and patients. These services improve patient understanding of medication use, side effects, dosage schedules, and lifestyle modifications.

2.4 Pharmacovigilance and Drug Safety Monitoring

Telepharmacy supports remote adverse drug reaction reporting and pharmacovigilance activities. AI-assisted systems help identify medication-related risks and improve patient safety.

2.5 Chronic Disease Management

Telepharmacy plays a critical role in managing chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and

cardiovascular disorders. Pharmacists provide regular follow-up consultations, monitor treatment adherence, and recommend therapeutic adjustments [21].

3. VIRTUAL CARE TECHNOLOGIES

3.1 Telemedicine Platforms

Telemedicine platforms enable healthcare providers to conduct remote consultations using video conferencing, messaging systems, and digital communication tools [22]. These systems reduce travel burdens and improve healthcare accessibility.

3.2 Electronic Health Records (EHRs)

EHR systems facilitate secure storage, sharing, and retrieval of patient information across healthcare settings. Integration of telepharmacy services with EHRs improves continuity of care and medication safety.

3.3 Wearable Monitoring Devices

Wearable technologies continuously monitor physiological parameters such as blood pressure, glucose levels, heart rate, and oxygen saturation [23]. These devices support remote patient monitoring and early detection of health deterioration.

3.4 Mobile Health Applications

Mobile applications provide appointment scheduling, medication reminders, symptom tracking, educational resources, and communication channels between patients and healthcare providers.

3.5 Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

AI technologies are increasingly integrated into telehealth systems to support predictive analytics, treatment recommendations, and medication safety [24]. Machine learning algorithms analyze patient data to identify clinical patterns and optimize healthcare interventions.

4. APPLICATIONS OF TELEPHARMACY AND VIRTUAL CARE

4.1 Community Pharmacy Services

Community pharmacies use telepharmacy systems for refill management, patient counseling, vaccination scheduling, medication synchronization, and adherence monitoring.

4.2 Hospital Pharmacy Services

Hospital telepharmacy programs support medication order verification, antimicrobial stewardship, intensive care monitoring, and emergency pharmaceutical consultations [25].

4.3 Mental Health Services

Virtual care platforms provide remote psychiatric consultations, counseling sessions, and medication management for patients with mental health disorders.

4.4 Pediatric Healthcare

Telehealth systems improve pediatric healthcare accessibility by facilitating remote consultations, medication counseling, and developmental monitoring.

4.5 Geriatric Care

Older adults benefit significantly from telepharmacy services due to frequent medication use and mobility limitations. Remote medication review programs help reduce polypharmacy risks.

4.6 Emergency and Disaster Response

During public health emergencies and natural disasters, virtual care systems maintain continuity of healthcare services while reducing exposure risks [26].

5. BENEFITS OF TELEPHARMACY AND VIRTUAL CARE

5.1 Improved Healthcare Accessibility

Telepharmacy significantly improves healthcare access for patients in rural and underserved regions where healthcare infrastructure is limited [27].

5.2 Enhanced Medication Adherence

Digital reminders, mobile applications, and virtual counseling improve patient adherence to prescribed medications and treatment plans.

5.3 Reduced Healthcare Costs

Studies indicate that telehealth services reduce hospitalization rates, transportation costs, emergency visits, and overall healthcare expenditures [28].

5.4 Increased Patient Satisfaction

Patients appreciate reduced waiting times, scheduling flexibility, convenience, and improved communication with healthcare providers.

5.5 Continuity of Care

Remote monitoring systems enable continuous management of chronic conditions and facilitate timely intervention when complications arise.

5.6 Workforce Optimization

Telepharmacy enables centralized pharmacists to support multiple healthcare facilities, addressing healthcare workforce shortages.

6. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND HEALTHCARE TRENDS

Table 0: Growth of Telehealth Utilization Worldwide

Year	Global Telehealth Usage (%)
2017	10
2018	15
2019	22
2020	48
2021	59
2022	67
2023	74
2024	79

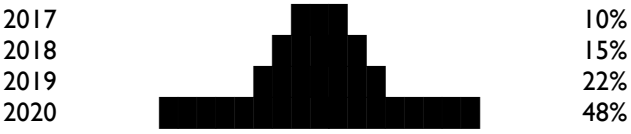

Figure 01: Graphical Representation Growth of Telehealth Utilization Worldwide

Observed Trends

- Significant increase during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Rising demand for chronic disease telemanagement
- Increased integration of AI-assisted healthcare systems
- Continued expansion of remote monitoring technologies

According to recent healthcare surveys, over 70% of healthcare institutions now utilize some form of telehealth platform for outpatient care [29].

7. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN TELEPHARMACY AND VIRTUAL CARE

Artificial intelligence has become a transformative component of digital healthcare systems.

AI Applications in Telehealth

7.1 Clinical Decision Support

AI algorithms analyze clinical data to identify medication interactions, contraindications, and adverse effects.

7.2 Predictive Analytics

Machine learning systems predict disease progression, hospitalization risk, and treatment outcomes based on patient data.

7.3 Virtual Health Assistants

AI-powered chatbots provide appointment scheduling, medication reminders, and symptom assessment support [30].

7.4 Personalized Medicine

AI supports individualized therapeutic planning based on patient genetics, medical history, and treatment response.

7.5 Automated Documentation

Speech recognition and natural language processing technologies improve clinical documentation efficiency.

AI integration enhances healthcare efficiency while reducing clinical workload and medication errors.

8. ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Patient Privacy and Confidentiality

Protection of patient data is essential within digital healthcare systems. Healthcare organizations must comply with cybersecurity regulations and implement strong encryption measures [31].

8.2 Informed Consent

Patients must receive clear information regarding telehealth procedures, data usage, and associated risks.

8.3 Healthcare Equity

Digital healthcare systems may unintentionally widen disparities among populations lacking internet access or digital literacy.

8.4 Professional Licensing and Regulation

Differences in telehealth regulations across jurisdictions complicate healthcare delivery and provider licensing.

8.5 Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence

AI systems must remain transparent, unbiased, and clinically validated to ensure safe healthcare decision-making.

9. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

9.1 Technological Barriers

Limited broadband connectivity and insufficient digital infrastructure remain major barriers in low-resource settings [32].

9.2 Cybersecurity Risks

Healthcare systems are vulnerable to cyberattacks, ransomware, and unauthorized access to patient records.

9.3 Limited Physical Assessment

Certain medical conditions require direct physical examination, limiting the effectiveness of virtual consultations.

9.4 Reimbursement Challenges

Insurance coverage and reimbursement policies for telehealth services remain inconsistent.

9.5 Resistance to Technological Adoption

Some healthcare providers and patients demonstrate reluctance toward digital healthcare technologies due to unfamiliarity or distrust.

10. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The future of telepharmacy and virtual care is expected to involve increased integration of advanced technologies and personalized healthcare models.

Emerging Innovations

10.1 Internet of Medical Things (IoMT)

IoMT devices will facilitate real-time health monitoring and automated data transmission.

10.2 Blockchain Technology

Blockchain systems may enhance healthcare data security, interoperability, and transparency.

10.3 Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality

VR and AR technologies may support remote rehabilitation, healthcare education, and surgical training.

10.4 Precision Digital Medicine

Integration of genomic medicine and AI will support individualized therapeutic interventions.

10.5 Smart Healthcare Ecosystems

Future healthcare systems may integrate robotics, AI, telepharmacy, and remote diagnostics into unified healthcare platforms.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize the effectiveness of telepharmacy and virtual healthcare systems, the following strategies are recommended:

Infrastructure Improvement

- Expand high-speed internet connectivity
- Improve interoperability among digital healthcare systems
- Invest in secure telehealth platforms

Education and Training

- Enhance digital literacy among patients and healthcare professionals
- Develop telehealth competency training programs

Regulatory Standardization

- Harmonize telehealth licensing regulations
- Establish clear reimbursement policies
- Strengthen cybersecurity standards

Research and Innovation

- Support clinical research evaluating telehealth outcomes
- Encourage development of AI-assisted healthcare tools

Patient Engagement

- Promote awareness regarding telehealth benefits
- Improve accessibility for elderly and disabled populations

12. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON TELEPHARMACY AND VIRTUAL CARE

The adoption of telepharmacy and virtual healthcare varies significantly across different regions due to differences in healthcare infrastructure, regulatory systems, economic conditions, and technological accessibility. High-income countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia have implemented advanced telehealth systems integrated with electronic health records, insurance reimbursement frameworks, and remote monitoring technologies [33]. In contrast, low- and middle-income countries continue to face infrastructural limitations, including inconsistent internet connectivity, shortages of trained personnel, and limited digital literacy.

In North America, telehealth systems became central to healthcare continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with healthcare organizations rapidly expanding virtual consultation services [34]. Government-supported reimbursement policies and expanded insurance coverage contributed significantly to telehealth adoption. Community pharmacies increasingly implemented telepharmacy programs for medication counseling, refill management, and chronic disease support.

European healthcare systems have emphasized integration of digital health within universal healthcare frameworks. Countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands developed national telemedicine strategies supporting remote consultations and electronic prescriptions. The European Union also introduced initiatives promoting cross-border digital healthcare interoperability.

In Asia, countries including India, China, Japan, and South Korea experienced rapid telehealth expansion driven by increasing smartphone penetration and digital health investments. Telepharmacy services have become particularly important in rural areas where healthcare workforce shortages persist. India's telemedicine guidelines introduced during the pandemic significantly accelerated digital healthcare adoption.

African healthcare systems continue to explore telehealth solutions to address healthcare workforce shortages and geographical barriers. Mobile-phone-based healthcare interventions have shown promise in improving medication adherence and maternal healthcare access.

Despite regional differences, global healthcare systems increasingly recognize telepharmacy and virtual care as essential components of sustainable healthcare delivery models.

13. RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Although telepharmacy and virtual healthcare systems have demonstrated substantial benefits, several research gaps remain. Long-term clinical outcome studies are still limited, particularly regarding chronic disease management, medication adherence sustainability, and healthcare cost-effectiveness over extended periods [35]. Future research should focus on evaluating long-term patient outcomes associated with telepharmacy interventions.

There is also a need for standardized telehealth evaluation frameworks to improve comparison among studies and healthcare systems. Variability in methodologies, patient populations, and technological platforms complicates interpretation of telehealth effectiveness.

Artificial intelligence integration within healthcare systems presents additional research opportunities. Future investigations should examine algorithm transparency, ethical AI implementation, clinical validation, and potential bias in machine learning systems [36]. Research into explainable AI models may improve trust and accountability within digital healthcare environments.

Digital equity remains another important research priority. Studies should explore strategies to improve healthcare access among elderly populations, socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, and individuals with limited digital literacy. Addressing these disparities is critical for ensuring equitable healthcare delivery.

Cybersecurity and patient privacy research are increasingly important as healthcare systems become more digitally interconnected. Future studies should evaluate methods for protecting sensitive healthcare information against cyber threats while maintaining system usability and interoperability.

Additionally, healthcare workforce training programs require further evaluation to determine effective methods for preparing healthcare professionals to operate within digital healthcare ecosystems. Interdisciplinary collaboration among healthcare providers, engineers, data scientists, and policymakers will be essential for advancing telepharmacy and virtual care research.

Future innovation is expected to focus on personalized digital therapeutics, precision medicine, blockchain-supported healthcare systems, and integration of Internet of Medical Things technologies into remote healthcare models.

14. CONCLUSION

Telepharmacy and virtual care have fundamentally transformed healthcare delivery by expanding healthcare accessibility, improving patient engagement, enhancing medication management, and supporting continuity of care through digital technologies. These systems became especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to shape modern healthcare infrastructure worldwide. Technological innovations including artificial intelligence, wearable monitoring devices, mobile health applications, and electronic health records have significantly strengthened telehealth capabilities.

Despite substantial progress, important challenges remain, including cybersecurity risks, regulatory inconsistencies, reimbursement limitations, digital literacy barriers, and ethical concerns related to patient privacy and equitable access. Addressing these issues through standardized regulations, infrastructure investment, workforce training, and technological innovation will be essential for sustainable implementation.

Future healthcare systems are expected to increasingly integrate telepharmacy, artificial intelligence, precision medicine, and remote monitoring technologies into comprehensive patient-centered digital healthcare ecosystems. Continued interdisciplinary collaboration, policy development, and research will play a crucial role in maximizing the potential of telepharmacy and virtual care while ensuring safe, equitable, and efficient healthcare delivery globally.

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