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Research Proposal

Topic: The Effectiveness of Telehealth Services in Improving Access to Healthcare in the UK: A Scoping Review

Telehealth played an important role in the health care system in the United Kingdom, particularly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the National Health Service (NHS) the use of technology including virtual consultations, remote monitoring and digital communication has transformed the way health services are delivered. This study's question is: *What works and what doesn't about the use of telehealth to improve access to health care for patients in the UK?* The purpose of this scoping review will be to summarise, describe and categorise the different types of telehealth services currently used in the NHS; *to review the impact of telehealth on access to health care and on patients' outcomes; and to discuss the barriers and facilitators to implementing telehealth within health care settings in the UK.*

This topic has grown in importance because of the demand from patients for a growing role for digital healthcare in the NHS, and the NHS staff shortages. Using telehealth can help extend access to health services to individuals in rural communities, with chronic conditions, older adults, and those who are mobility impaired. It can cut down on travel time, waiting times and improve the productivity of the health care system. However, its successful implementation is hindered by challenges like digital exclusion, availability of internet, patient privacy, and technology acceptance. The scoping review will give a broad overview of evidence on the effectiveness of telehealth and highlight gaps for further research. Recent evidence of the positive impact of telehealth on patient satisfaction and accessibility of health services (World Health Organisation, 2021; NHS England, 2023; Murphy et al., 2021) supported by the right digital infrastructure and clinical guidance can be identified.

This study will take a scoping review approach and review and analyse the available evidence, in relation to the UK healthcare context and telehealth. Peer-reviewed articles that were published in English within the past seven years (2020-2026) will be searched in electronic databases like PubMed, CINAHL, MEDLINE, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The key words include: "telehealth", "telemedicine", "digital health", "healthcare access", "NHS", "United Kingdom". Studies will be included if they focus on health services and telehealth interventions, but will be excluded if they are conference abstracts, opinion articles, or studies that do not focus on health services. Data is to be systematically extracted and analysed through thematic analysis to uncover any themes, outcomes and evidence gaps.

As this study uses only published literature, ethical approval is not required. The review will be presented in a way that reflects high academic integrity including a clear reference to all sources used with the Harvard reference style, without plagiarism and with objective findings.

Reference:

- Murphy, M., Scott, L. J., Salisbury, C., et al. (2021). Implementation of remote consulting in UK primary care following the COVID-19 pandemic: A mixed-methods longitudinal study. *British Journal of General Practice*, 71(704), e166–e177.
- NHS England. (2023). *Transforming care with digital technology*.
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Global strategy on digital health 2020–2025*.