

## **Title: The Emergence of Virtual Health During COVID-19**

**Lead Author:** Kathleen Pugh, Victoria Ngo, Zachary Mayo, Abigail Hewitt (MS2, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine)

**Abstract:** The goal of this study was to investigate the emergence of telehealth in primary care, particularly its capabilities as a tool during the COVID-19 pandemic and its potential moving forward. A recurring nationwide survey, “Quick COVID-19 Primary Survey,” was distributed to clinicians via professional societies and organizations, listservs, and practice-based research networks to assess primary care’s response and capacity to provide services during the pandemic. Responses from fourteen surveys between March 13 and June 15 involving virtual health were extracted for further qualitative and quantitative analysis. Overall, there was a shift from a reliance on phone calls for telehealth to an increasing prevalence of video calls. Despite the rapid transition to virtual health services, 42% of the total telehealth comments were positive or neutral. Responses highlighted the flexibility and increased access virtual health provides, and by the later weeks, the percentage of telehealth comments actively calling for it to continue in the future tripled. Some concerns included technological issues associated with the transition, as well as implications for reimbursement and liability. Geriatricians also identified concerns regarding older patients’ technology access and the sustainability of video visits. Nonetheless, with the integration of telehealth, more than 75% of clinicians stated video or phone appointments were well-suited for primary care visits such as stable chronic illness, medication reconciliation, behavioral health, and chronic pain. Furthermore, we saw specialty specific uses such as for ADLs/IADLs in geriatrics and developmental assessments in pediatrics. These results indicate that telehealth has a lasting place in primary care.