

Telehealth Navigator Project: Increasing access to telehealth services in underserved primary care settings



Lara Westbrook; Arianna Lee; Angad Singh, MD; Renata Thronson, MD | University of Washington School of Medicine

Research Question: Does a Telehealth Navigation Service Learning Project successfully connect patients to their telemedicine visits?

Background

- COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a rapid expansion of telehealth
- Prior research: videoconferencing visits may be clinically superior than phone visits
- Historically disadvantaged communities are relatively underserved by telehealth
- Providers in county hospital-based clinics expressed need for real-time support for patients, leading to creation of the Telehealth Navigator Project (TNP)

Telehealth Navigator Project

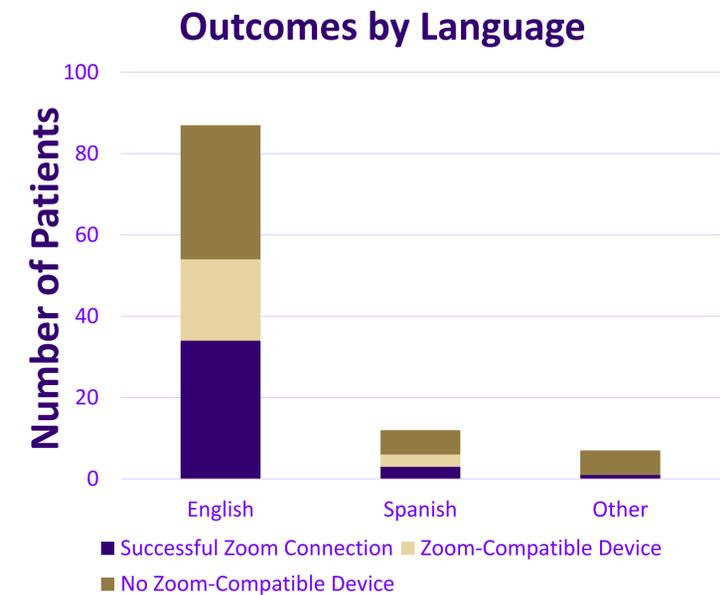
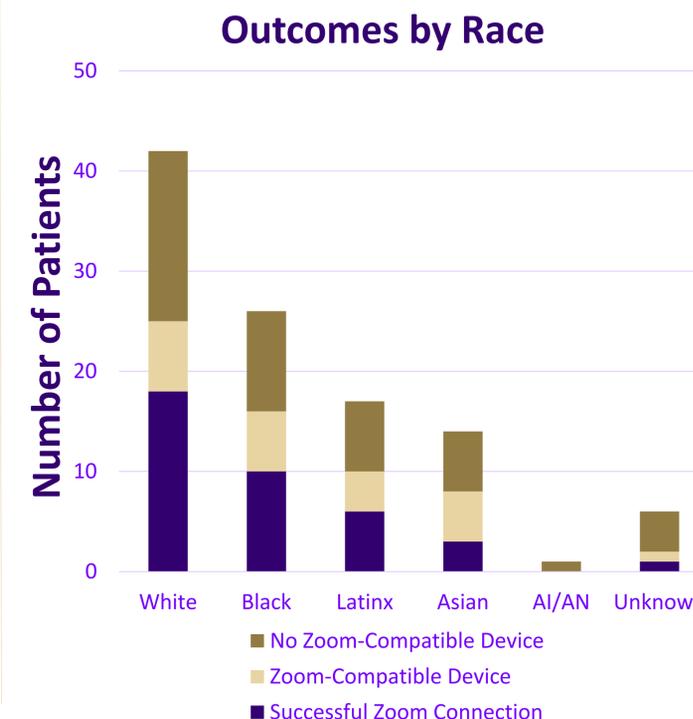
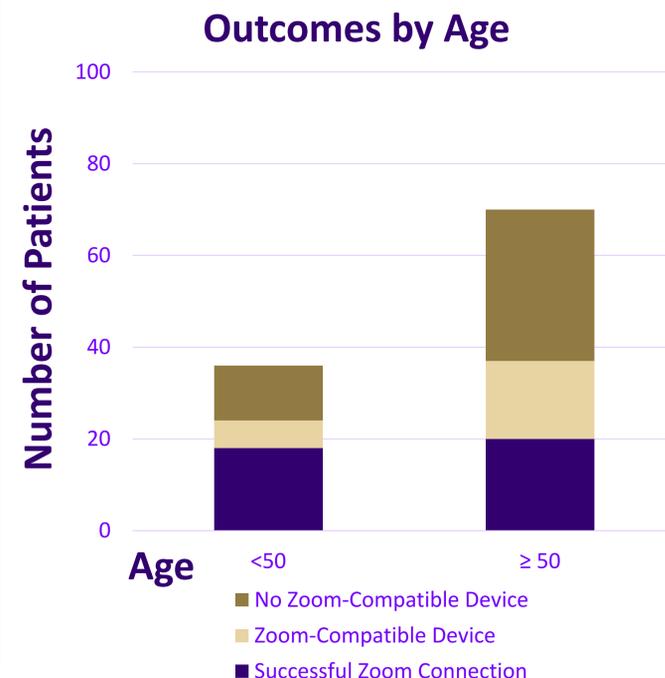
- Protocol: developed by medical students, practicing clinicians, and telemedicine experts
- Volunteers: graduate health science students
- Target population: adult patients scheduled for a telehealth visit (phone or videoconferencing) at one of two primary care clinics at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, Washington
- Goal: improve connectivity to videoconferencing technology; convert phone visits to video visits

Intervention

- Volunteers conducted outreach calls 15-30 minutes prior to the patient's scheduled phone or videoconferencing visit
- Offered one-on-one assistance in accessing videoconferencing platform for the visit, using language-appropriate phone interpreters as needed
- Patient demographics, barriers to virtual care, and outcomes of each outreach call were tracked for quality improvement monitoring

Results

- TNP spoke with 76.4% of patients (n=106)
- 57.5% patients had a Zoom-compatible device, mostly smartphones.
- Of patients who had a Zoom-compatible device (n=61):
 - Age range: 23-89
 - 62.3% successfully connected to Zoom
 - 44.3% initially scheduled phone visits; 44.4% of these were successfully converted to Zoom



Conclusions & Future Directions

- TNP has had success in connecting patients with appropriate technology to Zoom and in converting phone visits to higher-quality video visits
- Overall success is limited by access to Zoom-compatible devices, particularly in patients over 50
- Need for further health navigation to increase success among those with appropriate technology
- Additional data collection and analysis will be completed to better understand TNP's impact and to target disparities in telehealth access among demographic groups.