

Telemedicine Successful in Treating Hep C Related to Opioid Use Disorder

Telemedicine treatment was twice as successful in curing hepatitis C compared with typical offsite referral.

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In recent years, telemedicine has transformed health care by increasing [access to care](#). Telemedicine has been particularly effective for treating and curing [hepatitis c virus \(HCV\)](#) in people with [opioid use disorder \(OUD\)](#) compared with typical care, [according to findings](#) presented at the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases.

Telemedicine, or the merging of modern technology and good old-fashioned health care, is increasingly covered by insurance, especially in states with large rural populations burdened by the need to travel considerable distances to find a medical specialist.

It's estimated that 2.4 million Americans are living with chronic HCV (about 1% of the adult population), according to [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). What's more, nearly 15,000 people died of HCV in 2020, and acute HCV cases quadrupled from 2009 to 2019.

University of Buffalo (UB) researchers sought to understand the effectiveness of telemedicine in underserved populations, including people with OUD and HCV, in an attempt to eliminate the need for offsite referrals, or the typical method for treating HCV, according to a [UB news release](#).

To compare onsite facilitates telemedicine to offsite referral to an HCV specialist, researchers performed multiple randomized controlled trials involving more than 600 people with HCV and OUD. These individuals then received treatment via direct acting antiviral medications for HCV. They were followed for two years after being cured and evaluated for reinfection.

Findings showed that telemedicine was effective in treating and curing individuals with HCV and OUD compared with usual care. In fact, nearly 91% of participants who received telemedicine were cured of HCV compared with about 35% of those who were referred to an offsite specialist. What's more, those who were cured of HCV experienced sustainable health and social benefits including increased self-confidence.

"Telemedicine leads to high patient retention in care and cure within this population," said principal investigator of the study Andrew H. Talal, MD, a professor of medicine in the Jacobs

School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at UB, in the news release.

Talal emphasized the importance and effectiveness of destigmatizing OUD and HCV treatment through telemedicine. He added that telemedicine should be further investigated to increase access to care and treatment for other underserved populations.

“Our study demonstrates how telemedicine successfully integrates medical and behavioral treatment,” he told UB. “Our participants viewed the opioid treatment program as a destigmatizing environment to begin with. When participants trust the staff in the program, that trust then extends to the telemedicine provider, especially when they express empathy. These attributes allow for successful HCV treatment and lead to high patient satisfaction through telemedicine.”

To learn more about Talal’s work in telemedicine, read “[How Telemedicine Can Bridge the Gaps in Hepatitis C Care](#).” For additional information, click [#Hepatitis C](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Telemedicine Program Successfully Treats Hep C in Inmates](#),” “[Improving Outcomes for Homeless People With HIV and Hepatitis C](#)” and “[How to Improve Hep C Treatment Among Those With Opioid Use Disorder](#).”

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