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Original Article:

Validation of the PCP Method in Telemedicine: Evaluating Patient Satisfaction and Adherence in a Current Context

Validación del método PCP en telemedicina: evaluación de la satisfacción y adherencia del paciente en un contexto actual

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Abstract

Telemedicine has established itself as a key tool for improving access to health services, especially in contexts with geographical and mobility limitations (Manocchia, 2020). This study evaluated the effectiveness of the PCP Method (Pre-consultation, Consultation, Post-consultation) in telemedicine and its impact on patient satisfaction and adherence. Through technologies such as video calls and electronic records, continuity of care was optimized.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teleconsultation proved to be an effective alternative in primary care, with high levels of satisfaction among patients due to the convenience and accessibility of the service (Gomes-de Almeida & Marabujo, 2021). A survey of 104 patients was conducted, combining qualitative and quantitative questions, and the results showed high satisfaction and adherence, highlighting the effectiveness and cost reduction of the model. However, its implementation faces challenges such as integration with traditional systems and acceptance by physicians and patients (Manocchia, 2020; Gomes-de Almeida & Marabujo, 2021).

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, telemedicine emerged as an essential strategy for the provision of health services, allowing for the continuity of remote medical care and reducing the risk of exposure for both patients and healthcare professionals (Becevic et al., 2020). Its exponential growth has had a positive impact on the accessibility and quality of medical care, particularly in non-urgent care, by facilitating remote consultations and optimizing healthcare resources (Whitten, Holtz & Laplante, 2010). Telemedicine has developed in various forms, from synchronous consultations to remote monitoring, establishing a broad framework of applications that require ongoing evaluation to ensure their effectiveness and acceptance (Bashshur et al., 2011).

However, the adoption of telemedicine faces challenges such as resistance to change, technological barriers, and concerns about data privacy and security (Kruse et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, several studies have shown that user satisfaction is a key factor in the consolidation of telemedicine as a model of care, highlighting convenience, accessibility, and cost reduction as the main benefits perceived by patients (García-Lizana & Muñoz-Mayorga, 2010). In addition, the doctor-patient relationship in virtual environments has evolved, requiring new communication strategies to ensure effective and empathetic care (Zweig, 2020).

The advancement of telemedicine has also been influenced by the development of digital literacy in health, especially among younger generations such as Generation Z, who seek medical information online and rely on digital platforms to manage their well-being (Jiao et al., 2023). This phenomenon highlights the importance of designing accessible and intuitive telemedicine models for different population groups, ensuring that digitization does not create gaps in medical care. Additionally, it has been noted that the integration of telemedicine in rural or hard-to-reach contexts has had a significant impact on health equity, facilitating the monitoring of chronic conditions and reducing treatment dropout rates (Monaghesh & Hajizadeh, 2020). This type of implementation requires structured and adaptable models that allow for comprehensive and sustainable care over time.

Likewise, recent systematic reviews have documented that the implementation of telemedicine is associated with improvements in clinical outcomes, high levels of patient satisfaction, and a reduction in healthcare system costs, even during health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Ekeland et al., 2010; Totten et al., 2016). This modality of care has also proven effective in the management of chronic diseases, promoting treatment adherence and continuity of care (Kruse et al., 2017; Portnoy et al., 2020). This evidence highlights the need to validate structured frameworks such as the PCP Method, which allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the patient experience in remote care.

This study seeks to validate the PCP Method (Pre-consultation, Consultation, Post-consultation) as an effective structure for evaluating patient satisfaction and adherence in telemedicine through an online survey, contributing to the optimization of remote care models.

Objectives

General objective:

To determine whether the PCP Method increases patient satisfaction and adherence to telemedicine consultations, understanding satisfaction as the user's positive perception of the care received, and adherence as their willingness to continue using the service, comply with medical instructions, and recommend it to others.

Specific objectives:

-To evaluate the level of patient satisfaction with the quality of medical care provided through telemedicine.

-To measure patient adherence in terms of future use of the service, compliance with recommendations, and recommendation to third parties.

-Validate the applicability of the PCP Method as a care structure in telemedicine services through a structured survey applied to actual users of the system.

Material and methods

A descriptive study with a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach was conducted during the period from March to May 2024. The target population consisted of adult patients who used telemedicine services at a private primary care institution in Ecuador. The inclusion criteria were: having completed at least one medical consultation via telemedicine during the study period, agreeing to participate voluntarily, and giving informed consent. Minors, those who did not complete the survey, or those who had difficulty understanding the questions were excluded.

The sample size was determined for convenience, considering a database of patients treated by telemedicine during the established period. A total of 104 patients were included.

For data collection, a structured survey in digital format (Google Forms) was applied, self-administered and distributed via email and instant messaging. The survey included six questions, of which four were closed-ended quantitative questions (Likert scale and multiple choice) and two were open-ended qualitative questions. The questionnaire was previously validated by expert judgment (three physicians specializing in family medicine and digital health), who reviewed the relevance, clarity, and consistency of the questions in relation to the study objectives.

The collection of information was supervised by the principal investigators and the technical team of the telemedicine unit, who also provided technical support to patients who required assistance in completing the form.

Regarding the validation of the PCP Method (Pre-consultation, Consultation, Post-consultation), the patient experience was structured in three phases: initial and orientational interaction (pre-consultation), synchronous consultation with the healthcare professional (consultation), and follow-up or subsequent recommendations (post-consultation). Each of these phases was considered in the design of the survey questions, and the results were analyzed based on the patient's perception of the entire medical care process. The validation was reflected in the levels of satisfaction, adherence, and willingness to use the PCP care model again. Descriptive statistics, dynamic tables, and content analysis were used.

Results

The survey given to participants consisted of six questions, four quantitative and two qualitative, as mentioned above. These questions explored aspects related to the patient's experience, including perception of resolution of their problem, assessment of the healthcare professional, and future willingness to use the service. The following findings were collected:

1. Resolution of the consultation: 92 % of patients stated that their health situation was completely resolved; 8 % indicated partial resolution.

Question 1: Did the online consultation resolve the health situation for which you requested it?

Table 1

ITEM	Did the online consultation resolve the health issue for which you requested it?
Partially	8 (8%)
YES	96 (92%)
Grand total	**104**

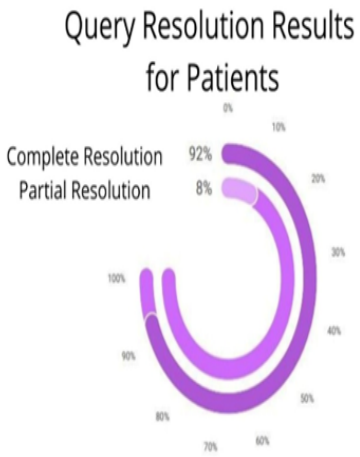

Figure 1. Percentage of consultations resolved through telemedicine (pie chart showing the distribution of responses)

The results obtained reflect the high effectiveness of telemedicine in resolving consultations, with 92 % of patients reporting a complete solution to their health problems. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the usefulness of telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it established itself as an effective tool for

remote medical care, reducing barriers to access and optimizing healthcare resources (Doraiswamy et al., 2020). Likewise, the implementation of telemedicine has been widely praised in systematic reviews, showing that its use not only facilitates continuity of care but also improves patients' perception of resolution, even in scenarios with technological and logistical limitations (Hincapié et al., 2020). These results reinforce the importance of continuing to optimize virtual care models to maximize their impact on patient satisfaction and adherence. In addition, studies such as that by Becevic et al. (2020) have shown that well-structured digital environments increase patient confidence in the healthcare system, which is essential for achieving effective care. Evidence suggests that maintaining high standards of service quality contributes significantly to the success of the telemedicine model (Whitten et al., 2010).

2. Health professional rating: 88 % gave a score of 10; 10 % gave a score of 9; and 2 % gave a score of 8.

Question 2: How would you rate the healthcare professional who treated you? (1 being the worst rating and 10 being the best rating).

Table 2.

ITEM	How would you rate the healthcare professional who treated you?
8	2 (2%)
9	10 (10%)
10	92 (88%)
Grand total	104

Figure 2. Distribution of ratings given to healthcare professionals (bar chart showing the proportion of responses)

High levels of satisfaction with healthcare professionals reflect not only the quality of care provided, but also the trust that patients place in telemedicine. Ninety-eight percent of respondents gave ratings of 9 or 10, suggesting that virtual care can be as effective and well-regarded as in-person care. Previous studies have noted that user perception of digital health platforms is strongly influenced by ease of use, effective communication, and the ability of professionals to build trust in virtual settings (García-Gómez et al., 2015). In addition, systematic reviews have found that telemedicine maintains high levels of patient satisfaction, largely due to reduced waiting times, accessibility, and personalized care, key factors that influence the perception of service quality (Kruse et al., 2017). These results are in line with the principles of the PCP Method, which emphasizes structured, patient-centered care. Finally, these findings highlight the importance of continuing to strengthen the training of healthcare professionals in digital communication skills and technological tools to ensure positive experiences in remote care.

3. Future use of the service: 99 % said they would use telemedicine again.

Question 3: Would you use this online consultation service again?

ITEM	Would you use this online consultation service again?
YES	103 (99%)
Maybe	1 (1%)
Grand total	**104**

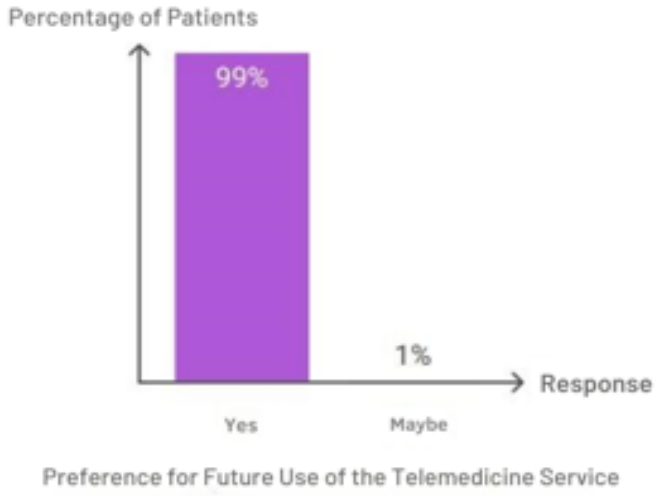

Figure 3. Preference for future use of telemedicine services (bar chart with response percentages)

The fact that 99% of patients said they would use the telemedicine service again reflects a high level of acceptance and satisfaction with virtual care. This data is consistent with the findings of previous research highlighting that telemedicine has gained strong preference among patients, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where convenience, accessibility, and efficiency were highlighted as decisive factors for its adoption (Portnoy et al., 2020). Furthermore, although some studies identify barriers to the global adoption of telemedicine, such as technological and infrastructure issues, satisfaction with virtual services remains remarkably high, suggesting that positive patient experiences drive continued use of these services in the future (Kruse et al., 2018).

This high intention to reuse indicates that digital care models, such as the PCP Method, are aligned with the expectations of the modern patient, who prioritizes flexibility, autonomy, and availability of medical services.

Studies such as those by Dorsey and Topol (2016) support this approach, noting that the sustainability of telemedicine will largely depend on its ability to integrate as a permanent option in the healthcare system.

4. Service recommendation: 98 % would recommend the service to family and friends.

Question 4: Would you recommend this service to family and friends?

Table 4.

ITEM	Would you recommend this service to family and friends?
Yes	102 (98%)
Maybe	2 (2%)
Overall total	104

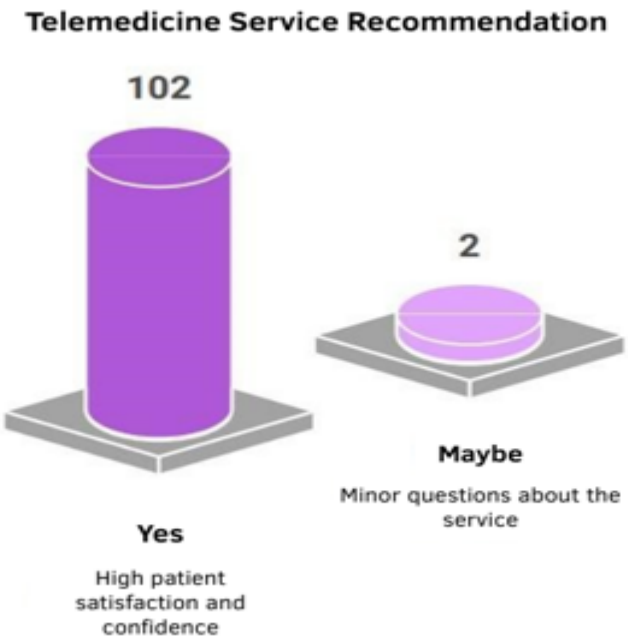

Figure 4. Recommendation of the telemedicine service (bar chart showing the distribution of responses)

The high percentage (98%) of patients who would recommend the service to family and friends highlights the widespread trust and satisfaction with telemedicine as a form of care. This finding is in line with previous studies that have found that the effectiveness and accessibility of telemedicine services drive positive recommendations among users. Research reviewed by Shigekawa et al. (2018) concludes that telemedicine has proven effective in a variety of conditions, creating a positive experience that facilitates recommendation of the service. Furthermore, Ekeland et al. (2010) indicate that patient satisfaction is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of telemedicine services, noting that the willingness to recommend these services is directly related to positive healthcare outcomes. This level of recommendation suggests that telemedicine has not only been effective in resolving consultations, but has also succeeded in establishing a relationship of trust between patients and healthcare providers. In this regard, studies such as those by Hollander and Carr (2020) and Smith et al. (2020) reinforce the idea that patient trust, an empathetic experience, and efficient care are key pillars for encouraging sustained recommendations and strengthening the digital health system.

5. Most valued aspects: Most valued aspects: the question was, "What did you like most about the online consultation?" Participants report that they consider online medical care to be an exceptional experience, highlighting the safety,

speed, and convenience of being able to access this medical care from their homes. However, they also emphasized other essential aspects, such as the quality of interaction with healthcare professionals, highlighting their kindness and professionalism. In addition, they appreciate the effectiveness in resolving their concerns and in the treatment provided. Therefore, this type of care provides patients with a warm and reliable experience that is not only convenient but also highly effective in personalizing treatments and resolving their health concerns and problems.

The aspects most valued by patients, such as safety, speed, comfort, and the quality of interaction with professionals, reflect telemedicine's ability to offer a personalized and efficient care experience. This finding supports the observations of previous studies, which indicate that telemedicine not only improves accessibility but also enables effective, personalized, and high-quality medical care (Dorsey & Topol, 2016; Totten et al., 2016). In addition, research such as that by Kruse et al. (2017) highlights that positive patient perception is closely related to the empathy of the professional and the ability to resolve concerns in real time. Patient trust and satisfaction with this model of care are key to its adoption and continued success.

6. Areas for improvement: The question was, "What do you think we could improve in future online consultations?" Participants express great satisfaction with online medical care and highlight several positive aspects. In general, they consider that everything went very well and feel comfortable and at ease during consultations. They appreciate the opportunity to have their questions answered effectively and praise the quality of care they have received so far. Despite this satisfaction, some patients have identified areas where improvements could be made; in particular, in the technical area, this means audio quality and connection stability as key points for improvement during care. These observations coincide with those documented by Gajarawala and Pelkowski (2021), who point out that technological limitations remain a significant barrier to the full development of telemedicine. Furthermore, studies such as those by Koonin et al. (2020) highlight that advances in connectivity and user technical training can have a significant impact on the perception of quality. Implementing improvements in these areas would further strengthen the patient experience and contribute to the sustainability of the model.

Discussion

The PCP Method proved to be highly effective in telemedicine. The results reflect a high level of health problem resolution, with 92 % of patients reporting that their situation was completely resolved, highlighting the effectiveness of this model in addressing patient needs. In addition, the outstanding rating given to healthcare professionals (88 % giving a score of 10) reflects not only technical competence, but also the quality of interaction and empathy shown by physicians, which is crucial for patient satisfaction (Hollander & Carr, 2020).

Acceptance of the service is remarkably high, with 99% of participants expressing their willingness to use the service again, demonstrating confidence in telemedicine as a mode of care. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have documented patients' growing preference for telemedicine services, especially in emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where accessibility and the convenience of receiving medical care from home become fundamental advantages (Smith et al., 2020).

The qualitative findings underscore that time optimization and accessibility are among the main benefits perceived by patients, reinforcing existing literature on the effectiveness of telemedicine in improving the efficiency of medical service delivery. The speed and convenience of online consultations, along with the ability to clear up doubts without the need to travel, highlight the usefulness of telemedicine in improving the overall patient experience, especially in the context of a healthcare system with physical or geographical limitations (Smith et al., 2020).

However, some patients suggested areas for improvement, especially in technical aspects such as audio quality and connection stability, highlighting the technological barriers that still persist in telemedicine. Despite significant advances, deficiencies in technological infrastructure remain a major challenge to ensuring a seamless care experience. This issue has been widely discussed in the literature, which points out that although telemedicine has proven to be a powerful tool, technical limitations can affect service quality (Hollander & Carr, 2020).

Likewise, studies such as those by Gajarawala and Pelkowski (2021) and Kruse et al. (2018) highlight that the user's perception of the reliability of the technology directly impacts their level of adherence, understood as the willingness to continue using and recommending the service. In this sense, the adherence observed in this study (expressed by the 98 % who would recommend it) corroborates the importance of a functional technical environment and a positive user experience. In addition, Ekeland et al. (2010) state that to maintain positive results, digital care models must be continuously evaluated and adjusted based on user feedback and technological advances.

Thus, it is recommended to continue researching and refining both the methodologies and technologies used in telemedicine to minimize these problems and optimize the patient experience in future consultations.

Conclusion

Telemedicine has proven to be a viable and effective alternative to traditional care, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it has eliminated geographical barriers and improved access to medical care. The PCP Method has established itself as an effective model for optimizing patient care, ensuring a satisfactory and personalized experience, which is reflected in high levels of satisfaction and patients' willingness to use this service again. The effectiveness of the PCP Method in improving the quality of care and promoting treatment adherence is consistent with previous findings that highlight the positive impact of telemedicine on improving health outcomes and patient satisfaction (Bashshur et al., 2020).

The results obtained in this study show that patients perceive telemedicine as a convenient, fast, and effective solution, especially in non-urgent care contexts or health emergencies such as the pandemic. By eliminating the need for travel and optimizing the use of time, this model has been key in promoting treatment adherence (García-Gil et al., 2020). However, areas for improvement were also identified, particularly in technical aspects such as audio quality and connection stability, which are common barriers in telemedicine and require ongoing attention to ensure an uninterrupted experience (Bashshur et al., 2020).

It is important to note that, despite the growing implementation of telemedicine, the validation of the PCP Method in this context appears to be a pioneering advance, as no previous specific studies have been found to evaluate it globally. This finding underscores the relevance of this research and its potential to contribute significantly to the existing literature on telemedicine, especially with regard to patient satisfaction and adherence (García-Gil et al., 2020).

Furthermore, studies such as those by Ekeland et al. (2010) and Kruse et al. (2017) highlight the importance of validating structured models that integrate clinical, technological, and user experience aspects. In this sense, the PCP Method represents a comprehensive methodological proposal that can be replicated and adapted in various contexts to strengthen remote medical care. The systematization of this model not only facilitates the continuous evaluation of the care process but also allows for the establishment of quality standards applicable to other digital health environments. In conclusion, it is recommended to continue implementing and refining the PCP Method in online healthcare, as well as to continue investing in technological improvements that overcome technical barriers. Furthermore, it is crucial to continue research in this field to further validate its effectiveness and applicability in different healthcare contexts. Telemedicine is here to stay, and its proper integration into global healthcare systems could revolutionize healthcare in the near future.

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Data and materials availability

The data analyzed during this study are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Informed consent

All participants signed an informed consent form before completing the survey. Data confidentiality was ensured in accordance with applicable ethical and privacy standards.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the results obtained or the writing of this article.

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