Utilizing Telehealth Model of Practice to Improve Collaboration Between Primary Care Physicians and Specialists for Digestive Disease Outcomes

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### Background and Significance

- Acute and chronic digestive diseases are major public health problems and important causes of mortality and morbidity in the United States. (NIDDK, 2017)
- Poor communication can lead to conflicting diagnosis and poor digestive disease outcomes.
- Studies have demonstrated that interactive communication between primary care physician (PCP) and specialists is associated with improved patient outcomes and quality of care. (Greer et al., 2019)
- Utilizing effective collaborative models of practice will improve digestive disease outcomes, thus reducing patient burden. (Thomas & Thomas, 2020)

### Purpose

1. To describe the gap in interactive communication between primary care physician and specialist that led to poor digestive disease outcomes in a patient.
2. To discuss how telehealth model of collaboration will open up opportunities to improve interactive communication between PCP/specialists, and thus quality digestive outcomes.

### Purpose 1: Case Report

**Alizia, 52/female, presents with chronic digestive issues for over 2 years.**

**PCP (1):**

- A. Stool PCR – Normal
- B. Blood work – Elevation in TAG and Cholesterol
- C. Mildly elevated Alanine Transaminase
- D. Recommendations: Fluids, high fiber diet, CT abdomen and pelvis (mild hepatic steatosis)

**PCP (2):**

- A. Possibility of lactose intolerance explored
- B. Recommendations: Lactaid and avoid dairy

**2nd visit to PCP (2):**

- A. U/S Abdomen – Biliary Sludge
- B. Recommendation: Refer to Surgeon and Gastroenterologist

- **Surgeon:** Hepatobiliary imaging recommended, and gallbladder removal discussed

- **Gastroenterologist (1):**
  - A. Upper GI endoscopy – normal
  - B. Recommendation: Refer to Hepatologist

- **Hepatologist:**
  - A. Anti-HbC – Negative
  - B. Fibroscan – Normal liver function

**PCP (1):**

- A. Advices against gallbladder surgery
- B. Recommendation: Colonoscopy – Normal

**Gastroenterologist (2):**

- A. SIBO test
- B. Pancreatic elastase – Normal
- C. Abdominal X Ray – Normal
- D. Recommendation: Peppermint oil
- E. Gut Directed Hypnotherapy

**Conclusion:** No definite diagnosis and treatment plan

### Purpose 2: Collaborative Models of Practice

**Search Strategy**

- The search for peer-reviewed articles between 2015-2020 were conducted.
- Searched PubMed, CINAHL, PsyCINFO, Web of Science, Google Scholar
- The search terms: "primary care physician and specialist collaboration", "collaborative models", "interactive communication", and "digestive diseases".
- The search yielded 7 studies on collaborative models of care between PCP and specialists. 4 articles focused on using telehealth model.

**Synthesis of Evidence**

The telehealth model that were employed by the primary care physician and specialist during the COVID-19 pandemic (Foy et al., 2020; Dobrusin et al., 2020)

- reduced the wait time for appointments
- improved provider consultation, interdisciplinary collaboration, patient education, and follow up phone calls.
- improved quality of care as evidenced by increased patient satisfaction, reduced cost for care, and the patient progressing toward recovery.

### Implication for Practice and Conclusion

- Collaboration between PCPs and digestive disease specialists is considered crucial to provide high quality health care.
- The burden of chronic diseases such as digestive diseases could be lessened by utilizing telehealth resources.
- **Telehealth model** might improve current models of care by increasing communication among clinicians, resulting in more efficient, higher quality, and less expensive care.

**Conclusion:** It is recommended to integrate telehealth model in clinical practice as:

- It will allow the patient in this case report, and in general, to access the providers
- It will assist the PCPs to access the specialists and interprofessional health care providers.

### References

https://www.niddk.nih.gov/healthinformation/healthstatistics/digestivediseases


