

Use of Telehealth at NHSC Grantee Sites

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OBJECTIVE

To explore whether and to what extent the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) grantee sites are utilizing telehealth.

DATA

2015 NHSC Participant Satisfaction Survey

METHODS

Building on an annual survey administered by HRSA to all NHSC participants, several additional questions specific to telehealth use were asked of NHSC participants who were currently fulfilling their service obligations. HRSA provided a dataset of individual responses from 3,744 NHSC participants, of which 2,418 were currently fulfilling their service obligations, and answered the question about whether telehealth is used at their site.

RESULTS

We find that 35.6 percent (861) of respondents reported telehealth is used at their practice site, with 46.8 percent using telehealth only as an origination site (i.e. where the patient is located), 15.5 percent as a distant site only (i.e. where the clinician is located), and 37.5 percent use both. We also find that only 24.5 percent (214) of the respondents practicing at sites that offer telehealth reported they personally use some form of telehealth services. The most common form of telehealth provided was behavioral health. In addition, analyses reveals important regional variation in the use of telehealth services, the types of telehealth services provided, and in the location of services.

CONCLUSIONS

Our preliminary analysis suggests that favorable state policies around coverage and reimbursement for telehealth services (e.g. parity of coverage, no provider or setting restrictions) may be leading to greater use of telehealth. Similarly, the data suggest a positive relationship between telehealth grant funds and increased use of telehealth services. We did not find a strong a relationship between telehealth usage and state policies focused on physician practice standards and licensure.

Key Words: telehealth, National Health Service Corps, grant funding, state policy