



The impact of telehealth on wait time for ENT specialty care.

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Abstract: Audiology in rural Alaska has changed dramatically in the past 6 years by integrating store and forward telemedicine into routine practice. The Audiology Department at the Norton Sound Health Corporation in rural Nome Alaska has used store-and-forward telemedicine since 2002. Between 2002 and 2007, over 3,000 direct audiology consultations with the Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) Department at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage were completed. This study is a 16-year retrospective analysis of ENT specialty clinic wait times on all new patient referrals made by the Norton Sound Health Corporation providers before (1992-2001) and after the initiation of telemedicine (2002-2007). Prior to use of telemedicine by audiology and ENT, 47% of new patient referrals would wait 5 months or longer to obtain an in-person ENT appointment; this dropped to 8% of all patients in the first 3 years with telemedicine and then less than 3% of all patients in next 3 years using telemedicine. The average wait time during the first 3 years using telemedicine was 2.9 months, a 31% drop compared with the average wait time of 4.2 months for the preceding years without telemedicine. The wait time then dropped to an average of 2.1 months during the next 3 years of telemedicine, a further drop of 28% compared with the first 3 years of telemedicine usage.

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