



A GP's Perspective of Telehealth in Residential Aged Care Facilities.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about telehealth services in RACFs.

GP: Well, residential aged care facilities are a complex field requiring the collaborative efforts of a variety of disciplines. Specialists such as geriatricians, psychogeriatricians, dermatologists, nurses, physiotherapists and others may all be involved in the care of the elderly. This may pose a logistical problem as it is not always possible for every specialist to attend the facility if it is located rurally or remotely, and even more difficult for our elderly patients to make a trip to the specialist.

Telegeriatrics offers a solution to this problem not just logistically, in terms of time and cost, but also medically. For example, we may have a patient whose health has been deteriorating in the last day or two but was unable to be seen by a geriatrician in a distant location straight away. In such a case, we would organise an ad hoc telegeriatric video consultation to discuss the provision of the best possible care for this patient quickly and efficiently.

Regular telehealth clinics in RACFs allow for management of chronic disease or disability which elderly people often suffer from. Ad hoc consultations can also be organised as the patients' needs change. It allows us as the GPs to collaborate better with the specialists, and improve medication management and quality of healthcare.

Interviewer: How did your elderly patients react to the use of telehealth services in aged care?

GP: Some of our patients did have doubts about telehealth when we first introduced it. Many of them felt it was very impersonal and could not visualise how a geriatrician in a distant location could do a medical examination on them. Many also have hearing loss and their overall health fluctuates. However, with the right education and by allowing them to 'trial' telehealth, they became more comfortable and excited by the technology. It wasn't just our patients who had doubts about the technology, but their families too. The family of one of our patients who has dementia were unsure whether their loved one will be better off with telehealth, but after conducting one consultation with a psychogeriatrician, they were impressed and found it a very positive experience. The patient could see the specialist on the screen and found the whole consultation clear and easy to follow.