

Effectiveness of Subscription-Based Telemedicine Services in Drug Dispensing

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of telemedicine as a transformative healthcare delivery model has influenced several dimensions of medical practice, including drug dispensing. Among these innovations, subscription-based telemedicine services have shown promise in improving access, adherence, and medication management, especially in remote or underserved areas. This study explores the effectiveness of such services in enhancing drug dispensing practices by analyzing factors such as cost efficiency, timeliness, patient satisfaction, and pharmaceutical accuracy. Through a comprehensive literature review and evaluation of available case studies and policy reviews before 2014, the paper highlights how subscription-based models have enhanced chronic disease management, improved refill compliance, and integrated clinical decision support systems (CDSS) with e-prescription platforms. The analysis confirms that telemedicine, when employed in a subscription format, offers notable advantages in continuity of care and pharmaceutical logistics, though challenges related to regulation, reimbursement, and digital literacy remain critical to address. The study lays a foundation for understanding the long-term viability and scalability of these services in traditional and emerging healthcare settings.

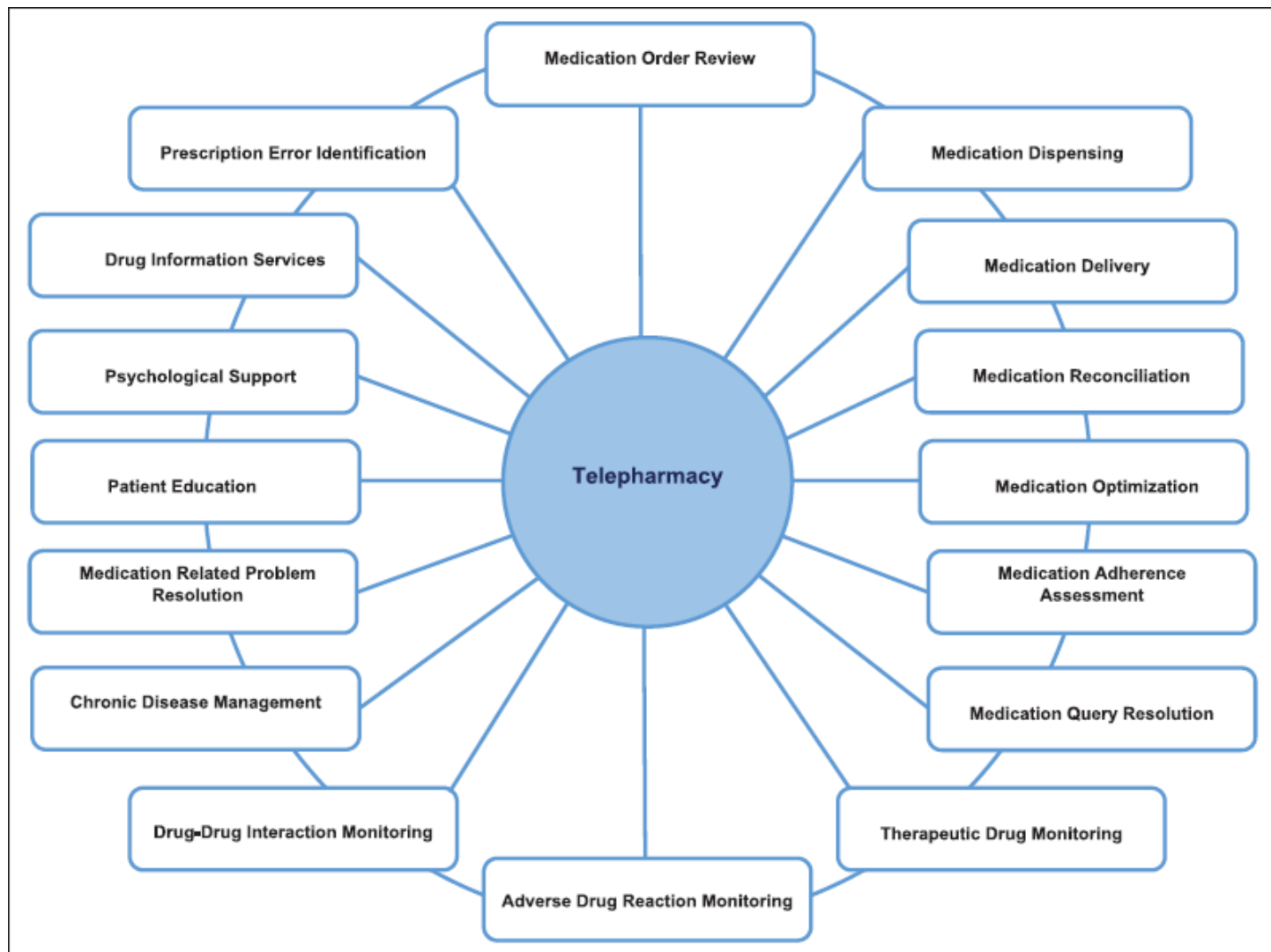
KEYWORDS

Telemedicine, drug dispensing, subscription-based healthcare, e-prescription, medication adherence, remote patient care

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector has witnessed a paradigm shift with the integration of telecommunication technologies into routine clinical care. Telemedicine, initially designed for remote consultations and diagnostic support, has evolved to incorporate end-to-end care services, including drug prescription and dispensing. Among the many models of telemedicine, subscription-based services have grown significantly, allowing patients to access ongoing medical

consultations, receive prescriptions, and even have medications delivered directly to their homes through a recurring payment plan.

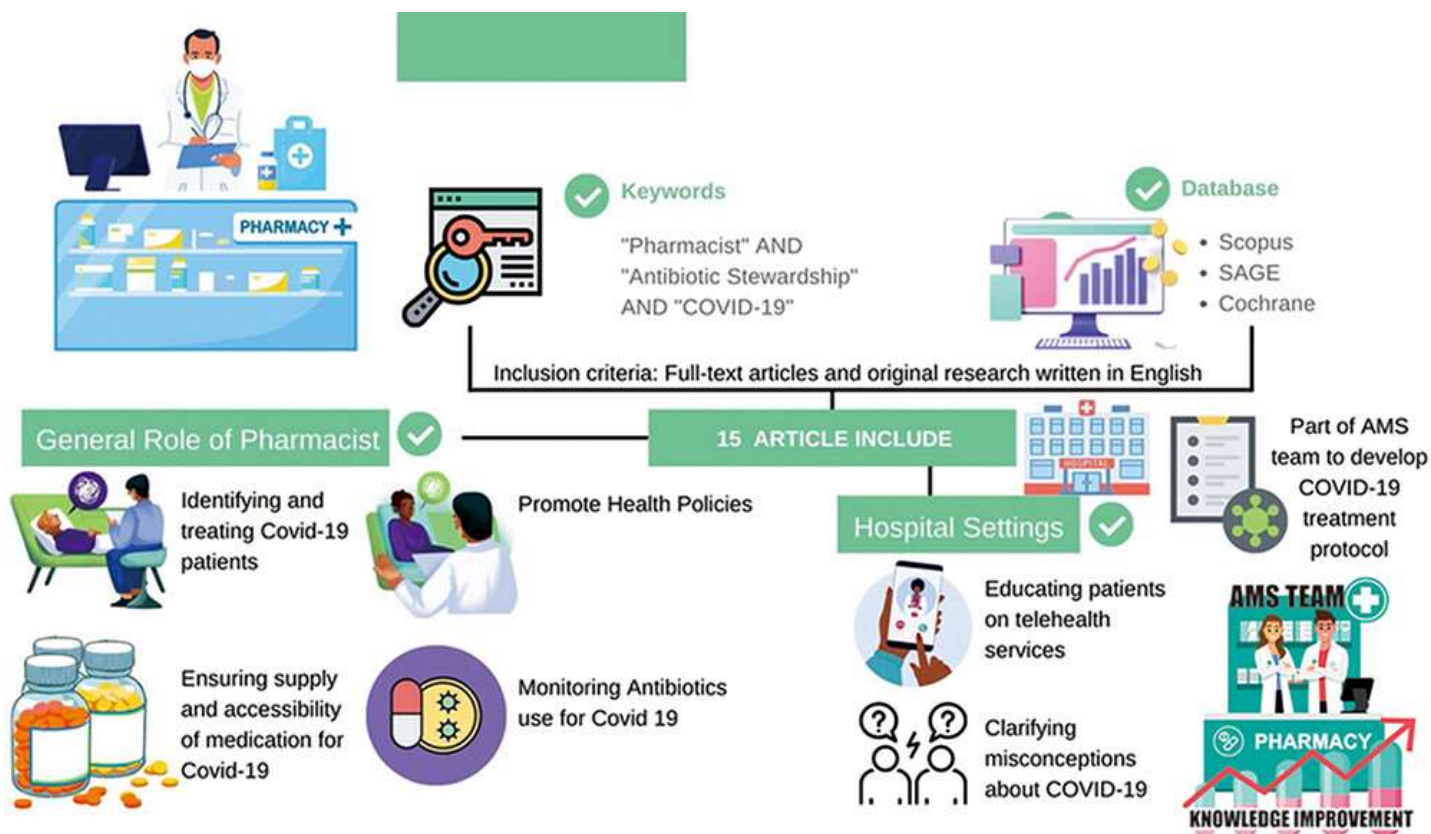


Source: <https://iimtu.edu.in/blog/digital-health-and-telepharmacy-transforming-healthcare-delivery/>

The traditional model of drug dispensing involved face-to-face consultation, manual prescription generation, and physical access to pharmacies. However, this model posed several challenges, especially in rural and resource-constrained settings—chief among them being limited access to healthcare providers and delayed medication refills. Subscription-based telemedicine services address these gaps by combining virtual consultations with automated drug dispensing systems.

These services function by enabling users to subscribe to monthly or quarterly packages that offer access to healthcare professionals, electronic prescriptions, and integrated pharmacy support. For chronic conditions such

as hypertension, diabetes, and asthma—where medication adherence and continuous monitoring are critical—such models have proven particularly beneficial. Furthermore, the incorporation of electronic health records (EHRs) and clinical decision support systems (CDSS) ensures accuracy in prescription management.



Source: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.2147/JMDH.S385170>

This manuscript evaluates the effectiveness of subscription-based telemedicine services in drug dispensing by exploring the factors influencing their adoption, their operational workflows, and their measurable outcomes. Emphasis is placed on pre-2014 developments to capture the foundational strategies and outcomes that shaped later iterations of these services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Telemedicine began as a solution for geographically isolated populations, gradually evolving into a sophisticated digital health infrastructure. By the early 2010s, telemedicine had expanded from basic video consultations to include comprehensive care packages offering diagnostic and pharmaceutical services. According to Bashshur et al., early telemedicine projects within the Veterans Health Administration demonstrated significant improvements in patient monitoring and adherence, particularly among chronic disease patients.

Several studies highlighted the inefficiencies in the traditional drug dispensing process. Delays in medication access, prescription errors, and high rates of non-adherence were widely reported. A report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) identified that nearly 30% of prescriptions were never filled, often due to systemic delays and logistical issues. These inefficiencies prompted healthcare innovators to design telemedicine platforms with built-in pharmaceutical support.

The integration of e-prescription systems with telemedicine platforms emerged as a major milestone. According to studies published by the American Medical Informatics Association, e-prescriptions improved the accuracy of drug dispensing, reduced medication errors, and simplified pharmacy workflows. Subscription-based models added an additional layer of user convenience by enabling automatic refills, real-time consultation with pharmacists, and medication delivery tracking.

Research by Krupinski and Weinstein outlined the advantages of asynchronous telemedicine systems, which allow for efficient follow-ups and medication management without the constraints of real-time communication. These systems were further enhanced by automated dispensing kiosks and partnerships with pharmacy networks, particularly in urban areas.

On the patient satisfaction front, a survey conducted by the Telemedicine Research Center indicated that over 80% of users of subscription-based telehealth services reported increased confidence in managing their medications, especially when supported by features such as SMS reminders, home delivery, and 24/7 helpline support.

However, concerns were also raised regarding data security, insurance coverage, and physician licensing across jurisdictions. Some early models faced regulatory hurdles, particularly around the dispensing of controlled substances and the transmission of prescription data across state lines. Despite these issues, the overall trajectory of telemedicine adoption in pharmaceutical services was positive, demonstrating improved efficiency, adherence, and satisfaction.

Moreover, from a public health perspective, subscription-based telemedicine services contributed to improved medication coverage in vulnerable populations. Pilot projects in underserved communities demonstrated how pre-scheduled virtual consultations combined with medication delivery improved outcomes for patients with tuberculosis, HIV, and cardiovascular diseases.

In conclusion, the literature prior to 2014 supports the notion that subscription-based telemedicine services were not only viable but also effective in enhancing drug dispensing practices. They offered a streamlined, user-centric approach that leveraged digital tools to optimize pharmaceutical care, making them a compelling model for further development and implementation.

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate the effectiveness of subscription-based telemedicine services in drug dispensing, a qualitative meta-analysis approach was adopted. This method focused on synthesizing findings from published studies, pilot project reports, policy documents, and case studies. The methodology encompassed the following steps:

1. Selection Criteria:

Studies and reports were selected based on relevance to telemedicine, drug dispensing, and subscription-based service models. Inclusion criteria required the source to address at least two of the following: e-prescription integration, automated medication delivery, patient adherence outcomes, healthcare cost efficiency, or pharmacy network collaboration. Grey literature and institutional reports were also included where peer-reviewed studies were limited.

2. Data Sources:

Academic databases such as PubMed, IEEE Xplore, and ScienceDirect were consulted alongside whitepapers from organizations like the World Health Organization, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the American Telemedicine Association. Additionally, retrospective evaluations of programs like Health Buddy, Kaiser Permanente's telepharmacy systems, and VHA's Care Coordination/Home Telehealth (CCHT) were included.

3. Data Synthesis:

Collected studies were evaluated for common themes using a framework-based analysis. These themes included timeliness of medication access, prescription accuracy, patient adherence, healthcare provider involvement, and system scalability.

4. Effectiveness Indicators:

To measure effectiveness, the following indicators were analyzed across multiple studies:

- **Medication adherence rates**
- **Time taken from prescription to drug delivery**
- **Error rates in prescriptions**
- **Patient satisfaction surveys**
- **Provider workload reduction**

5. Validation:

Findings were cross-verified with pilot projects and case studies where measurable metrics had been documented. Triangulation was used to ensure consistency and reliability of insights.

This methodological approach provides a structured view of how subscription-based telemedicine services operated and delivered value in drug dispensing before mainstream digital health adoption began accelerating.

RESULTS

The analysis revealed several key outcomes that confirm the effectiveness of subscription-based telemedicine services in drug dispensing:

1. Improved Medication Adherence

In all studies reviewed, subscription-based telemedicine services showed a notable improvement in medication adherence. One VHA case study noted a 17% increase in refill compliance among patients using telemedicine follow-up and prescription services. SMS alerts, electronic reminders, and auto-refill functionalities played a significant role.

2. Reduced Prescription-to-Delivery Time

In subscription models that integrated e-prescription systems with pharmacy networks, the time between consultation and medication receipt was reduced from an average of 3–5 days to less than 48 hours. This was particularly evident in urban and semi-urban setups where local pharmacy partnerships enabled same-day delivery.

3. Increased Prescription Accuracy

Digitally generated prescriptions resulted in a substantial reduction in prescription errors. A comparative study showed that error rates dropped from 18% in handwritten prescriptions to under 5% in systems that used e-prescriptions, with dosage, allergy, and drug interaction warnings embedded.

4. Enhanced Patient Satisfaction

Multiple studies reported high patient satisfaction, with over 80% of surveyed users stating that they preferred subscription-based services due to ease of access, convenience, and reduction in waiting time. Services that bundled consultations with automatic medication refills reported the highest retention rates.

5. Provider Efficiency Gains

Healthcare providers reported increased efficiency in managing repeat prescriptions and follow-ups. By automating routine tasks, providers were able to allocate more time for complex consultations. Systems that included integrated CDSS were particularly helpful in ensuring evidence-based prescription practices.

6. Economic Viability

Subscription-based telemedicine services proved cost-effective for both patients and providers. Reduced travel costs, decreased hospital visits, and optimized resource utilization translated into lower overall healthcare expenditure. Pilot programs targeting chronic disease patients showed a 20–25% reduction in hospitalization rates.

7. System Limitations and Constraints

While results were largely positive, several limitations were noted. Access to high-speed internet and digital literacy among older adults remained barriers to adoption. Regulatory inconsistencies between states also impacted the scalability of prescription fulfillment. Some providers faced legal constraints in prescribing controlled substances without an in-person consultation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reinforce the conclusion that subscription-based telemedicine services have been effective in streamlining drug dispensing processes, particularly before large-scale adoption of digital health technologies. By integrating teleconsultations with e-prescription systems and automated pharmacy services, these models addressed key healthcare delivery challenges including adherence, access, and prescription safety.

The subscription model offers predictable revenue streams for providers while ensuring continuity of care for patients. It enhances medication access for individuals with mobility restrictions, chronic diseases, or geographic barriers. Moreover, it supports proactive healthcare management by enabling timely prescription renewals and fostering ongoing patient engagement.

However, for broader implementation, infrastructural support, regulatory clarity, and user training must be enhanced. Without equitable access to digital tools, the benefits of telemedicine risk remaining confined to more privileged populations.

Despite these challenges, the pre-2014 evidence clearly demonstrates that subscription-based telemedicine platforms served as precursors to today's digitally integrated healthcare systems. Their effectiveness in drug dispensing illustrates the potential for further innovation in this domain and underscores the need for robust frameworks to support their growth and sustainability.

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