The Path of Telemedicine in Disaster Response

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Abstract

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Telehealth, or the use of digital health technology to support clinical care, education, and health administration over a distance, has increased dramatically in the 21st century. The frequency and severity of disasters that cause damage, disruption, loss of life, and health service deterioration have also increased over the same period. Advances in telecommunication networks and mobile technology have made telehealth systems more accessible and affordable, and rising acceptance has engaged hesitant users. Yet, telehealth remains underutilized particularly for cross-jurisdictional disaster response in the United States. In this presentation, we will discuss progress in the development and implementation of new regional disaster telehealth systems funded by the U.S. Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response. We will review administrative and legal barriers to implementation in the context of real-world examples to understand how they impact domestic disaster response capabilities. We will also discuss innovative new global partnerships that have successfully leveraged digital tools to provide access to health resources for international humanitarian disaster response. Finally, we will consider next steps in the path to fully actualizing the potential for telehealth to transform disaster response.

Learning Objectives: Discuss current federally funded efforts to develop and implement regional telehealth systems designed to support cross-jurisdictional disaster medical response in the United States.

Examine administrative and legal barriers to adoption and implementation that can impact timely mobilization, deployment, and use of disaster telehealth services.

Review examples of successful and failed implementation to guide future research, development, and implementation efforts for system developers, sponsors, and governmental and non-governmental disaster response entities.

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