



Research Week 2021

Efficacy of digital health evaluations for patients undergoing advanced hernia and abdominal wall reconstruction

Ashraf Samhan, BS; Mudassir S. Akhter, MBBS; Emaad J. Iqbal, MD; Elizabeth Dewey; Stephanie MacDonald, BS; Alden Wyland, BS; Robert Martindale, MD, PhD; Sean Orenstein, MD; Vahan C. Nikolian, MD

samhan@ohsu.edu

Medical Student, Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR

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Abstract

Background

Telemedicine has emerged as a viable option for the management of surgical patient populations. We review our experience in applying telemedicine in an advanced hernia and abdominal wall reconstruction program during the pandemic.

Methods

A retrospective review of all adult patients who were evaluated via telemedicine (telephone or video visits) from March 2020 to January 2021. Demographics, diagnosis, plan of treatment, and visit types were reviewed. Outcomes for patients undergoing telemedicine evaluations were summarized to understand the efficacy of preoperative evaluations as well as postoperative outcomes. Patient centric metrics related to time saved for travel or off work were evaluated.

Results

A total of 200 telemedicine evaluations were conducted on 170 patients (40% female). Visit types included new patient initial evaluations (28.5%), established patients evaluated in advance of surgery (21%), immediate postoperative patients (19.5%), and patients followed in surveillance (29%). Preoperatively, patients were more commonly evaluated via telephone (64.5%). Common indications for preoperative evaluation included inguinal hernia (22%), ventral incisional hernia (53%), and parastomal hernia (8%). The majority of patients (58%) evaluated for hernias had recurrent hernias and were referred by regional surgeons seeking advanced surgical consultation. Postoperative evaluations were conducted for patients undergoing similar case

types with no complications related to telemedicine evaluation noted. Patients evaluated via telemedicine saved a median of 62.7 (IQR: 17-186) miles per commute.

Conclusions

Telemedicine is an effective and efficient means to evaluate and manage patient with hernias and abdominal wall reconstruction needs. Current emergency regulatory changes related to telemedicine evaluations should be maintained to allow for continued access for patients seeking advanced surgical evaluation.