

Reducing Missed Appointments and Boosting Revenue: Exploring Telemedicine's Role in Hospital Financial Improvement

Eyad Talib Tawbah

2021201564

Bachelor of Project Management, Medocean university

Dr. Mona Moustafa Elashry

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Abstract

Telemedicine offers potential to improve hospital finances by reducing missed appointments. Studies have shown it can decrease missed appointments by 4–6% compared to in-person visits. This study investigates the financial benefits of telemedicine for hospitals through reduced missed appointments and increase the revenue. The methodology build based on Adepoju, O.E., Angelocci, T., & Matuk-Villazon, O. (2022). and Atmojo, J.T., Sudaryanto, W.T., Widiyanto, A., Ernawati, E., & Arradini, D. (2020). By understanding the impact of telemedicine on missed appointments, hospitals can optimize their financial performance and improve financial optimization and patients satisfaction.

Keywords: Telemedicine, Hospital Revenue, Missed appointments, Financial optimization, Healthcare Cost.

Introduction

Telemedicine known as the use of electronic communication for remote healthcare, holds significant promise for improving patient access and hospital finances. Studies show potential for increased revenue, reduced costs, and improved patient satisfaction. (Dharmar, 2013) reports a \$101,744 annual revenue increase in pediatrics, while (Atmojo, 2020) highlights similar gains across departments. Notably, telemedicine can reduce missed appointments (Adepoju, 2022), leading to cost savings. However, the financial impact likely varies depending on factors like hospital type, specialty, and implementation strategies. Furthermore, telemedicine expands access to care for underserved communities.

Millions rely on Community Health Centers (FQHCs) for affordable care, and the CARES Act's temporary telemedicine expansions allowed them to serve patients remotely. However, resource limitations and COVID restrictions initially hampered FQHC adoption.

Research shows telemedicine's benefits extend beyond financial gains. For patients, it reduces travel time and costs, eliminates time off work, and offers on-demand options, ultimately enhancing satisfaction (Atmojo, 2020). Telemedicine utilization in various departments has been shown to reduce healthcare costs by 56% and patient travel costs by 94%.

Understanding Missed Appointments and the Potential of Telemedicine:

1. **Unveiling the Root Causes:** To effectively utilize telemedicine, we must first delve into the primary reasons patients miss appointments. Is it forgetfulness, lack of transportation, childcare obstacles, or scheduling conflicts? Conducting surveys and analyzing data will provide crucial insights into these motivations.
2. **Assessing Telemedicine's Impact:** Once we understand the "why" behind missed appointments, we can evaluate telemedicine's potential impact. Can virtual consultations reduce barriers like transportation access or childcare demands? Will it improve appointment reminder systems and communication with patients? Exploring existing research and conducting pilot programs can shed light on its effectiveness.
3. **Identifying Ideal Applications:** Not all departments or specialties will benefit equally from telemedicine. Carefully consider which areas align best with this technology. Does the specialty involve primarily non-physical examinations or follow-up consultations? Are patients geographically dispersed or face limited mobility? These factors will help pinpoint where telemedicine can maximize its benefit.
4. **Implementing in New Territory:** If your organization lacks prior experience with telemedicine, a phased approach is key. Start with a pilot program in a selected department or specialty. Address potential technical hurdles, train healthcare providers, and educate patients effectively. Gather feedback, analyze results, and iterate based on learnings before scaling up.

Research Questions

1. Cost-Effectiveness Analysis:

Question: Does the cost of implementing and maintaining telemedicine infrastructure outweigh the financial benefits gained through reduced missed appointments and potentially increased patient volume for specific hospital departments?

2. Telemedicine Adoption Rates and Barriers:

Question: What are the key factors influencing the adoption rate of telemedicine among different hospital departments (e.g., specialty, patient demographics), and how can these barriers be addressed to encourage wider utilization?

3. Telehealth and Underserved Communities:

Question: Beyond resource limitations, what are the specific social and cultural factors affecting telemedicine adoption within underserved communities, and how can these be mitigated to ensure equitable access to care?

4. Long-Term Patient Satisfaction with Telemedicine:

Question: How does long-term patient satisfaction with telemedicine consultations compare to traditional in-person visits, and how does this satisfaction vary across different patient demographics and healthcare needs?

5. Integration with Existing Hospital Systems:

Question: What are the most efficient and cost-effective ways to integrate telemedicine technology with existing hospital information systems to ensure seamless data transfer and patient care coordination?

Research objectives

Overall Objective: Investigate the financial and operational impact of telemedicine implementation in hospitals, with a focus on reducing missed appointments and boosting revenue.

Specific Objectives:

1. Quantify the financial benefits of telemedicine:
 - a. Analyze the cost savings associated with reduced missed appointments across various hospital departments.
 - b. Evaluate the potential for increased revenue through telemedicine consultations, considering factors like patient volume and service type.
 - c. Conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis to compare the implementation and maintenance costs of telemedicine infrastructure with the projected financial gains.
2. Identify factors influencing telemedicine adoption:
 - a. Investigate the reasons behind different adoption rates of telemedicine among hospital departments. (e.g., specialty, patient demographics)
 - b. Explore the barriers hindering wider telemedicine utilization within hospitals and develop strategies to overcome them.
3. Ensure equitable access to telemedicine:
 - a. Identify social and cultural factors affecting telemedicine adoption in underserved communities beyond resource limitations.
 - b. Develop strategies to mitigate these barriers and promote equitable access to telemedicine for all patient populations.
4. Evaluate long-term patient satisfaction:
 - a. Compare patient satisfaction levels with telemedicine consultations over time against traditional in-person visits.
 - b. Analyze how patient satisfaction with telemedicine varies based on demographics and healthcare needs.
5. Optimize telemedicine integration:
 - a. Identify the most efficient and cost-effective methods to integrate telemedicine technology with existing hospital information systems.
 - b. Ensure seamless data transfer and patient care coordination through effective integration strategies.

Hypothesis

1. Financial Benefits

- c. Hospitals that implement telemedicine will experience a significant reduction in missed appointments compared to hospitals that do not.
- d. The cost savings from reduced missed appointments due to telemedicine implementation will outweigh the cost of implementing and maintaining the infrastructure.
- e. Hospitals offering telemedicine consultations will see an increase in revenue due to a higher volume of patients compared to traditional in-person visits.

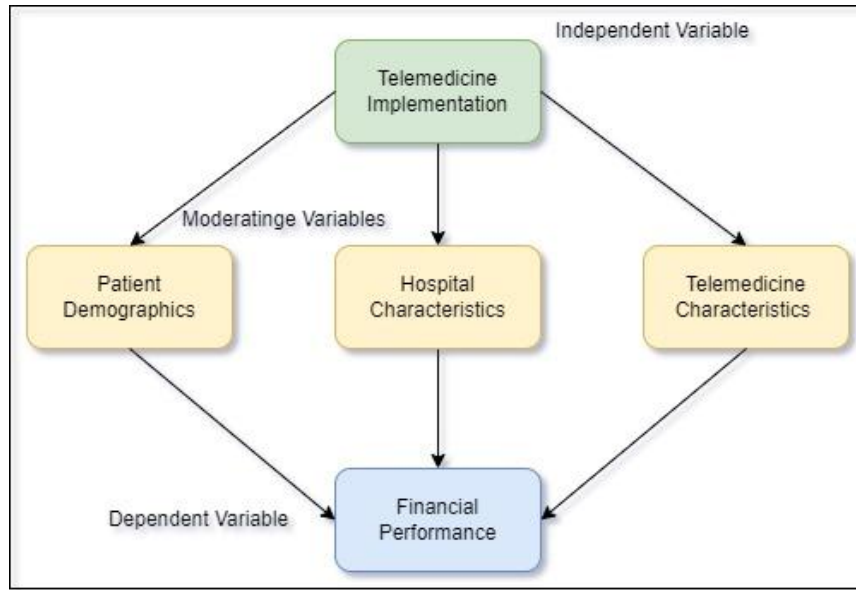
2. Adoption and Equity

- f. Telemedicine adoption rates will vary among different hospital departments, with specialties that rely less on physical examinations being more likely to adopt telemedicine.
- g. Hospitals serving underserved communities will have lower telemedicine adoption rates due to social and cultural factors beyond resource limitations.

3. Patient Satisfaction

- h. Patients will report higher long-term satisfaction with telemedicine consultations compared to traditional in-person visits, particularly those who face challenges with travel or time off work.
- i. Patient satisfaction with telemedicine will vary depending on demographics and healthcare needs.

Research Model



Conceptual Framework

1. **Independent Variable:** Telemedicine Implementation
2. **Dependent Variable:** Hospital Financial Performance (Reduced missed appointments, Increased revenue)
3. **Moderating Variables:**
 - a. Hospital characteristics (Type, size, specialty mix)
 - b. Patient demographics (Location, socioeconomic status)
 - c. Telemedicine characteristics (Services offered, technology used)

Research Methodology

Introduction

The methodology involved a retrospective review of hospital and physician billing records for patients transferred from 16 hospitals where telemedicine services were implemented, comparing various financial parameters before and after the deployment of telemedicine. Data on patient characteristics and financial outcomes were collected and analyzed using statistical software. California (Northern California) Please refer to (Dharmar, 2013) for the list of the hospitals. While in Texas, involved examining savings from averted missed appointments following telemedicine adoption, conducting a cost assessment, computing missed appointment rates, and translating reductions into actual numbers of averted missed appointments.

Operational definitions for research variables

1. **Telemedicine Implementation:**

- Definition: The use of telecommunication technologies to provide remote healthcare services.
- Operationalization: Implementation involves setting up telecommunication infrastructure, training healthcare providers, and establishing protocols for virtual consultations.

2. **Hospital Financial Performance:**

- Definition: The economic outcome of hospital operations, measured through revenue, cost savings, and profitability.
- Operationalization: Evaluated by analyzing metrics such as reduced missed appointments, increased patient volume, and revenue generated from telemedicine services.

3. **Missed Appointments:**

- Definition: Instances where patients do not attend scheduled medical appointments.
- Operationalization: Measured by comparing the rate of missed appointments before and after telemedicine implementation.

4. **Revenue:**

- Definition: The total income generated from hospital services.
- Operationalization: Assessed by calculating the income from telemedicine consultations and comparing it with the income from traditional in-person visits.

5. Patient Satisfaction:

- Definition: The level of contentment among patients regarding healthcare services received.
- Operationalization: Measured through surveys and feedback comparing long-term satisfaction levels between telemedicine consultations and traditional in-person visits.

6. Adoption Rate:

- Definition: The extent to which telemedicine is embraced and utilized by hospital departments.
- Operationalization: Assessed by analyzing the frequency and proportion of telemedicine use across different hospital departments.

7. Cost-Effectiveness:

- Definition: The economic efficiency of telemedicine in delivering healthcare services.
- Operationalization: Conducted through a cost-benefit analysis comparing the costs of telemedicine implementation and maintenance with the financial gains from reduced missed appointments and increased revenue.

8. Barriers to Telemedicine Adoption:

- Definition: Factors that hinder the widespread use of telemedicine.
- Operationalization: Identified through surveys and interviews focusing on technological, social, and cultural obstacles faced by different hospital departments and underserved communities.

9. Equitable Access:

- Definition: Fair distribution of telemedicine services among all patient populations, including underserved communities.
- Operationalization: Evaluated by analyzing telemedicine adoption rates and barriers within underserved communities, aiming to ensure all patients have equal access to healthcare services.

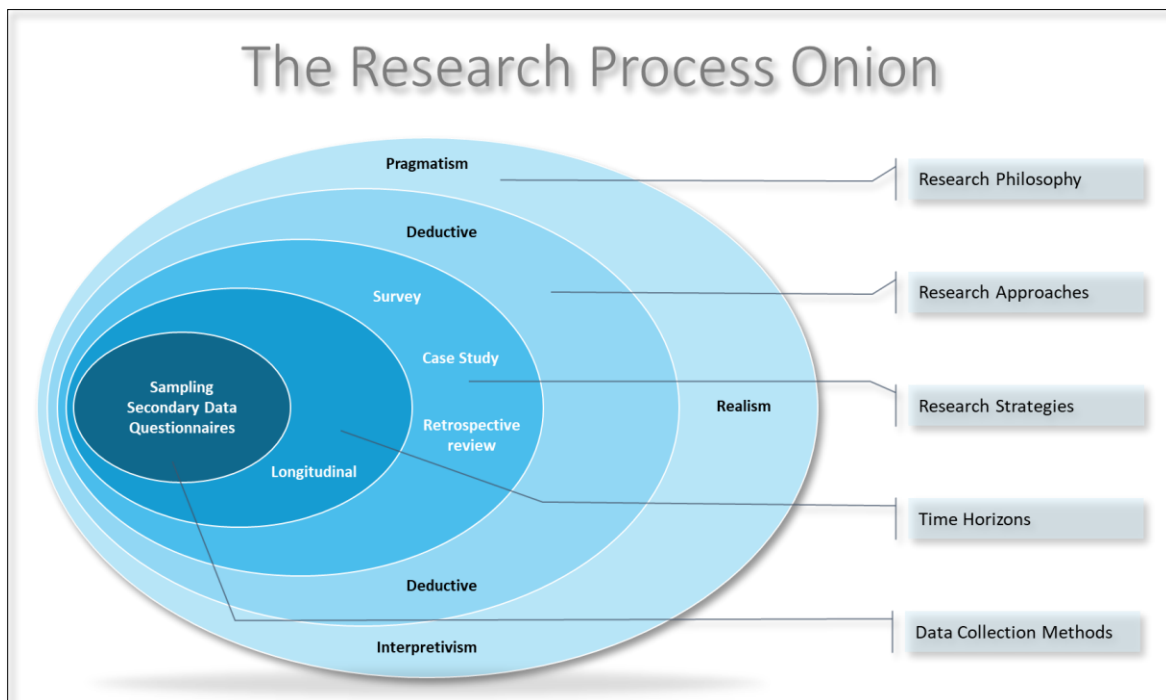
The experimental techniques used in this study included:

- a. Analyzing missed appointment rates for different types of patient encounters and translating these reductions into cost savings.

- b. Examining patient demographics (mean age, source location) and health factors (acuity level, type of insurance).
- c. Assessing hospital utilization (length of stay, number of transfers from telemedicine hospitals) and financial performance (total and annual hospital revenue, total and annual professional billing revenue)

Research design

1. **Philosophy:** Pragmatism
2. **Approach:** Deductive
3. **Strategy:** Survey
4. **Choice:** Quantitative
5. **Time Horizon:** Longitudinal
6. **Techniques and Procedures:**
 - Data Collection: Retrospective review of hospital records, patient demographics, and financial outcomes.
 - Data Analysis: Statistical analysis comparing financial and operational metrics pre- and post-telemedicine implementation.



Conclusion

This study investigates the financial benefits of telemedicine implementation in hospitals, focusing on reducing missed appointments and boosting revenue.

The research explores existing literature and proposes a framework to analyze telemedicine's impact. Here are the key takeaways:

- Telemedicine shows promise in reducing missed appointments (Adepoju, 2022) and generating additional revenue (Dharmar, 2013).
- Understanding the reasons behind missed appointments (transportation, childcare) is crucial for maximizing telemedicine's effectiveness.
- A cost-effectiveness analysis is necessary to weigh the cost of implementing telemedicine against the projected financial gains.
- Factors like hospital type, specialty, and patient demographics can influence telemedicine adoption rates.
- Social and cultural factors may affect telemedicine use in underserved communities.

The proposed research aims to:

- Quantify the financial benefits of telemedicine by analyzing cost savings from reduced missed appointments and potential revenue increases.
- Identify factors influencing telemedicine adoption within hospitals and develop strategies to overcome barriers.
- Ensure equitable access to telemedicine by mitigating social and cultural barriers in underserved communities.
- Evaluate long-term patient satisfaction with telemedicine consultations compared to traditional visits.
- Optimize telemedicine integration with existing hospital systems for seamless data transfer and care coordination.

By investigating these factors, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for hospitals considering telemedicine implementation to optimize their financial performance and improve patient satisfaction.

Literature Review

Introduction:

Telemedicine, the use of telecommunication technologies for remote healthcare delivery, is gaining traction as a strategy to improve healthcare access and cost-effectiveness. This review examines the evidence from various studies on the impact of telemedicine across different healthcare settings.

Cost-Effectiveness:

Multiple studies support the cost-effectiveness of telemedicine. Atmojo et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review revealing significant cost reductions across specialties like dermatology, radiology, pediatrics, and intensive care units (ICUs). Their findings suggest reductions in healthcare costs by up to 56% and patient travel costs by up to 94%. Additionally, a study analyzing a large Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) network demonstrated a reduction in missed appointments through telemedicine, translating to substantial revenue gains (estimated \$45,578 per month). These findings suggest telemedicine can benefit both patients and healthcare institutions.

Patient Satisfaction:

Studies highlight potential advantages for patients, including reduced travel time and cost, elimination of missed work for appointments, on-demand healthcare options, and shorter waiting times (Atmojo et al., 2020). These factors can lead to increased patient satisfaction with healthcare services.

Market Share and Revenue Growth:

Telemedicine programs can also positively impact a healthcare institution's market share and revenue. A study on a children's hospital found an increase in patient transfers from remote hospitals with telemedicine implementation, leading to a significant rise in annual revenue (total increase: \$1.6 million). This suggests telemedicine can be a strategic tool for attracting patients in a competitive healthcare market.

Statistical Analysis:

The aforementioned FQHC network study provides a statistical example of telemedicine's impact. The study showed a significant decrease in missed appointment rates with telemedicine compared to in-person visits (21% vs. 19% and 15%). This translates to estimated monthly cost savings of \$16,444 and \$29,134 for telemedicine alone and with pre-visit support, respectively.

Limitations and Future Research:

While the reviewed studies offer promising results, limitations exist. The limited number of studies included in some reviews necessitates further research for generalizability. Additionally, factors like specific telemedicine implementation strategies, variations in healthcare systems, and the digital divide need further exploration. Future research should investigate the long-term cost-effectiveness of telemedicine programs, its impact on patient outcomes, and the development of best practices for diverse healthcare settings.

Additional Considerations:

- The Children's Hospital study highlights the potential increase in patient transfers and revenue due to telemedicine. However, limitations include the single-center design and potential confounding factors influencing transfer rates.
- It's important to acknowledge the potential financial costs associated with implementing telemedicine programs. Further research is needed to assess cost-effectiveness from various perspectives.
- Addressing the digital divide is crucial to ensure equitable access to telemedicine services, particularly for underserved populations.

Conclusion:

Telemedicine offers a compelling solution for improving healthcare access and cost-effectiveness. By reducing costs, increasing patient satisfaction, and potentially expanding market share, telemedicine has the potential to transform healthcare

delivery. Further research is crucial to optimize its implementation and ensure equitable access for all.

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Appendix

Google form questionnaire: <https://forms.gle/hU3ZTWUoGDadqcgZ8>

Table () for the instrument of the independent variable.....

Variable	Dimensions	Number of Items	Sources
Telemedicine Implementation	Telemedicine and Patient Outcomes	7	
	Limitations	6	
	digital divide	5	
	Over all	18	