

LETTERS

Continuity of care: the key in telemedicine

As mentioned in the *CMAJ* news piece by Wendy Glauser, new technologies in health care are improving medical access for Canadians, but like any innovations, they can raise concerns among medical professionals and patients.¹

The recent Ipsos-CMA poll reports that Canadians are largely favourable toward innovations in health care and telemedicine. However, some are worried that telemedicine leads to a loss of human connection and compassion.

That is why continuity of care is paramount in telemedicine, and why all virtual clinics should focus on maintaining continuity when delivering their services.

Dialogue — a virtual care software platform that incorporates artificial intelligence — enables continuity of care by connecting patients with the same professional, whenever possible. Continuity of care also means checking in with patients after each consultation to ensure that they are recovering. Finally, Dialogue shares patient information with the patient's other practitioners, if the patient consents.

These are the quality standards that must prevail in telemedicine so that more Canadians can benefit from virtual care and the unprecedented access that it provides for patients across the country.

We strongly believe that these standards will prevent the fragmentation of primary care, thereby maintaining the continuity that leads to the best possible patient outcomes.

We also strongly believe that innovations like telemedicine are improving access to health care and, as medical professionals, we should embrace them while holding ourselves to the highest quality standards and making patient safety and needs our highest priority.

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Reference

1. Glauser W. Virtual care has potential to fragment primary care and disturb continuity of care, warn doctors [news]. *CMAJ* 2019 191:E1038-9.

Competing interests: Mark Dermer is the medical director and chief privacy officer of Dialogue Technologies and reports receiving contractor fees from the company. Dr. Dermer also provides clinical telemedicine services to patients via Dialogue's virtual care software platform, and receives payment from Dialogue for providing those services. Julien Martel is the chief medical officer at Dialogue Technologies and reports receiving contractor fees from the company. Alexandra Greenhill was an advisor and then the interim chief medical officer at Dialogue Technologies between Sept 2016 and Feb 2018. Dr. Greenhill is currently the chief executive officer and chief medical officer of Careteam Technologies, a digital health care coordination platform that doesn't offer telehealth.