Telemedicine: A user's perspective

The article titled "Embracing a Revolution- Telemedicine" was highly educative and contemporary. The author has dealt in depth with the technical aspects of telemedicine. As users of this technology for the last 18 months from two separate remote hospitals, we would like to make the following observations and suggestions:

1. Legal issues mentioned by the author in passing, are important concerns. Questions arise as to,

Is the advice given by the consultant from a tertiary center binding on the treating doctor seeking the consultation? Is the consultant giving advice legally liable for his advice?

In the medical context a "consultation" or "opinion entails" certain preclusions i.e. an interaction between doctor and patient, clinical examination and evaluation. The advice thus obtained is binding on the attending physician and the consultant is liable for his consultation.

Telemedicine involves a consultant depending on the skill of the attending physician and hence his "advice" is dependent on the

limitations of the attending physician. A telemedicine consultation may therefore be termed "tele-advice" which is just an "advice" and neither binding on the attending physician nor is the consultant liable for his advice.

2. Given the short reaction time in emergency conditions the utility of this technology can be limited. In services, consultation, may involve specialist/super specialist examination, investigation, and "opinion" where telemedicine may obviate necessity of movement of patients.
3. Attending academic events by telemedicine has been a boon to us at remote far-flung locations.

Reference

1. Dheer A, Chaturvedi RK. Embracing a Revolution – Telemedicine. MJAFI 2005; 61: 51-6.

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Reply

The comments to the letter to editor in response to article "Embracing a Revolution – Telemedicine" are as under-

- a) **Para 1** -The comments of the reader are appreciated and I concur with his suggestion.
- b) **Para 2** -The reader's concern is genuine but it is possible to tackle emergencies with confidence with the help of advice available through Telemedicine, since all medical officers are trained to tackle and stabilize the patient before transferring them to the concerned specialist/super specialist. A careful evaluation on case-to-case basis is necessary. As regards consultation with specialist/super specialist, Telemedicine will

help the needy who could only dream of treatment on expert advice. It all depends on the competence of the one taking advice, one giving advice, standard of telemedicine infrastructure—monitoring equipment and availability of drugs. It is therefore of paramount importance for the policy makers to deliberate on all the aspects of technology to suit Indian conditions/limitations.

- c) **Para 3** - The comments made are agreed to.

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