

Patient experience and satisfaction with the use of HIV telemedicine services among HIV+ individuals living throughout rural Alabama

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Issue:

The Southern region of the United States has become an epicenter of the HIV epidemic. In Alabama, HIV prevalence rates continue to rise with limited access to HIV primary care, particularly in rural counties.

Multiple structural factors, such as geographic distance, poverty, social stigma, limited public transportation, and fewer HIV specialists impact access to ongoing HIV clinical care in Alabama.

To increase HIV healthcare access, the "Alabama eHealth" program was developed. It uses telemedicine technology to provide HIV primary care at remote satellite clinics throughout rural Alabama.

This qualitative study aims to better understand patients' experiences and satisfaction with receiving HIV telemedicine services through the program.

Methods:

In 2011, MAO began the Alabama eHealth program. The program uses telemedicine equipment to provide real-time, face to face, video appointments between an HIV provider based at a central clinic and patients at remote satellite clinics (see Figure 1)

An on-site nurse is stationed at remote clinic sites and wireless blue-tooth peripheral stethoscopes, as well as other medical devices, are used to facilitate the delivery of HIV clinical care.

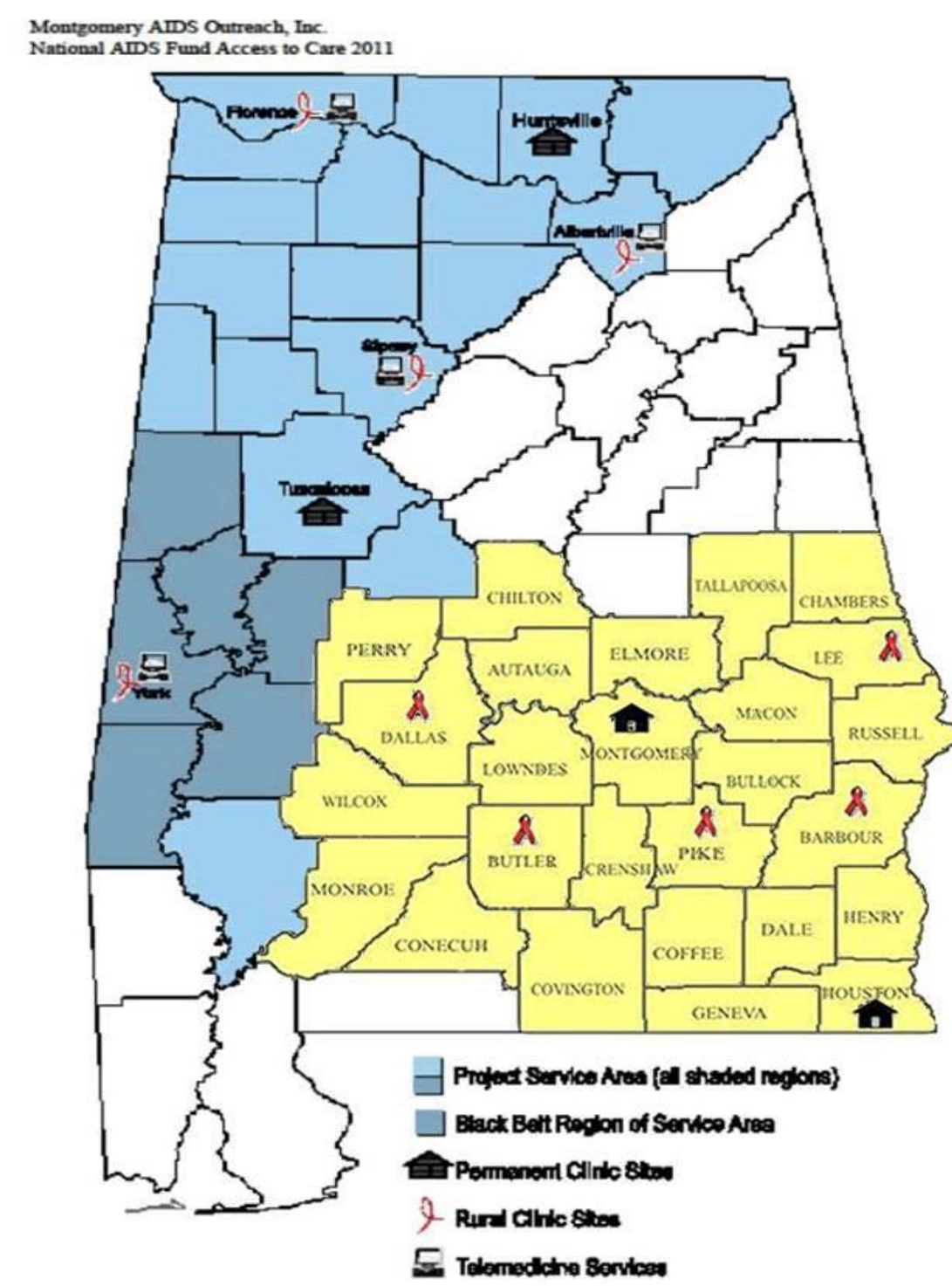
From September through January 2014, we conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews of 20 HIV+ individuals receiving ongoing telemedicine services.

18 of the 20 interviews were conducted face to face and 2 were via video.

We recruited participants from two of the satellite clinics (Selma & Huntsville).

Interviewer followed a semi-structured protocol that assessed the follow domains: 1) Initial reaction/experience with telemedicine; 2) Comparison with face to face care; 3) Things they liked most or least about telemedicine; 4) Impact on provider trust; 5) Level of satisfaction, and 6) recommendations to improve program.

Interviews ranged from 8 to 15 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. Initial coding was based from interview protocol. A content analysis was conducted to identify common themes that emerged.



Participant Characteristics	Percentage (N)
Gender	
Male	75% (15)
Female	25% (5)
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	80% (16)
White	15% (3)
Hispanic	5% (1)
Age, mean (SD), y	42 (9)
Average # of Telemedicine Service Visits	3 visits (min = 2, max = 5)

Conclusions:

Patients had initial apprehension and skepticism with telemedicine, but it quickly passed. Over time, patients begin to see telemedicine as no different than face to face care

A good provider & staff who buy into the telemedicine services can greatly help patients get comfortable with telemedicine services. Initial face to face contact can help "bridge the transition"

88% of participants reported being extremely satisfied with telemedicine services and expressed extreme gratitude for having access to compassionate HIV care

Findings

Patient experiences and satisfaction were overwhelming positive

Initial Reactions	Liked Most
<p>Theme: Uncertainty/Apprehension/Concern</p> <p>"It was a shock to me" "Wow it's something different, but I like it" "Seeing him on the TV, he said he's going to check my chest; I was like "How you gonna do that" "At first it was a little scary but after that it was fine" "It was fun"</p> <p>Theme: Skepticism</p> <p>"I was nervous skeptical but they took us through it step by step, gradually, eased you into it" Once met him & felt him out properly was good." "I was not happy. My reaction was how was this going to work. I thought it was very impersonal. I only had one request before starting & that is to meet the Dr. face to face first... And that worked for me. Once I met him & then saw him through Telemedicine, oh I was fine". "They did the stethoscope and one of the interesting things about it that particular day he was also listening at my stomach & he said "Oh, you're hungry" "I'm going like "Yeah you're right.. It's really sensitive equipment it works!"</p> <p>Theme: Gratitude</p> <p>"Just happy to be getting care"</p>	<p>Theme: Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> " An advantage is that you don't have to worry that you're not going to be able to see the Dr. You can get him from anywhere as long as he's hooked up" "You can be in and out quickly" " Seeing him is enough" " I do internet chat so it's like the same thing" <p>Theme: Compassionate Care</p> <p>ALL patient made reference to HIV primary care provider as: "great", "likeable", "caring", "funny", "cool", "serious about his job" & "respectful- thanks me when I first sat down" "Nursing staff are all great"</p>
Comparisons to Face to Face Care	Liked Least
<p>For the majority of those interviewed, "it wouldn't matter" if they saw him through the TV or face to face. A few ideally preferred face to face and few "liked the TV better"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It's not really different because it's the same person" "Seeing Dr. V in person & then on TV: I see it the same" "I don't see any difference. The only difference is that he doesn't put his hands on me. The nurse does all that" 	<p>Majority could not identify a least favorite thing about telemedicine Some response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I'm a little camera shy" " Sometimes hard to hear" "Bad weather interferes with connection"
Patient Satisfaction	Provider Trust
<p>Patients asked on a scale from 1 to 10 to rate level of satisfaction with the telemedicine services they receive: (1 = Extremely Unsatisfied) to 10 = Extremely Satisfied)</p> <p><u>17</u> patients rated it 10 out of 10!!!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It's good" "quick on time, y'all doing a good job" "Doing what they are supposed to be doing" "most definitely 10" "Very good" <p><u>2</u> patients rated it 9 out of 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Always room for improvement" "Basically, it's the same for me" <p><u>1</u> patient rated it 5 out of 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I would take out the TV part" 	<p>Provider Trust</p> <p>Consistent theme of genuine trust in medical provider across all patients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I trust him even though I haven't met him" " I really trust him" " I have a good connection with him, the nurses too" "That's my buddy"
Recommendations	
<p>Main recommendation: A face to face contact with provider prior to starting telemedicine can help facilitate provider trust and buy-in of telemedicine care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I would like to see him now and then, but no real difference" <p>Majority of patients had no specific recommendations when asked directly & pushed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Maybe the size of the TV could be bigger" "Bigger screen" 	

