

## Reviewer's report

**Title:** Telemedicine in clinical practice: a review of the literature

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 13 February 2007

**Reviewer:** Marie-Pierre Gagnon

### Reviewer's report:

#### General

This is an interesting and original contribution to the field of telehealth implementation. Studies rarely address characteristic of telehealth applications at the clinical routinization phase. However, the manuscript is lengthy and some sections require major revisions.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The authors did not convince me of the appropriateness of choosing a qualitative methodology in their review. Justification of the method used should be based on the on the particular nature of data and knowledge found in the literature on the routinization of telemedicine services (which is mostly qualitative), not on the limitations regarding the quantitative approach!

The Methods section does not provide sufficient details to assess the rigor of the search strategy. For instance, how many reviewers assessed the studies? Was there a validation of the keywords? Have the authors searched references of and citations to included studies?

Authors have only included studies grouped the in the "clinical use" category, but they do not provide the criteria on which they based their classification (e.g. age of the telemedicine service, integration into a clinical service/department, volume of use, etc.). It would be helpful to have those criteria defined in the Data analysis subsection.

Also, the Appendix should provide more details about the studies included in the review: location, participants, study design.

The Result section should be reorganized according to the themes (common features) emerging from the qualitative analysis. There is a discrepancy in the wording and number of common features described. Authors enumerate 6 common features, but there are two #4 and the last feature (the need to secure future operation....) is not numerated.

In the first subsection, Features #1 and #2 are discussed together; this should be mentioned explicitly. Furthermore, a fifth subsection should be added to present the findings related to the sustainability of telemedicine services, following the subsection "Organisational and technical arrangements". Figure 2 should also be changed accordingly.

Finally, the subsections of the Discussion "Many different actors..." and "Uncertainty following..." are lengthy and do not refer explicitly to the results of the literature review. The authors should either remove completely this part or shorten it and integrate it with the previous subsections.

The content of the subsection "Studies of successful telemedicine: project or routine?" should be integrated with the subsection discussing the sustainability of telemedicine services.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

The references in the first paragraph of page 3 should be placed in numerical order (12,13,14).

A description of the data saturation method should be provided.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The paragraph describing the EndNote software (page 4) is superfluous.

The reference to Chau & Jen-Hwa Hu should be checked (I have seen it as Chau & Hu).

The Figure 1 could be presented as a flow diagram describing the different steps of the literature review.

I suggest the use of the labels "Box 2" and "Box 3" instead of "Figure 2" and "Figure 3".

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.