

TELEMEDICINE AS CARE ASSISTANT PALLIATIVES IN THE ELDERLY: A LITERATURE REVISION

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Abstract: Objective: To investigate the importance of telemedicine as an aid to palliative care in elderly patients. Methodology: This is an integrative literature review, in which articles were searched in the databases indexed in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS) and Scientific Electronic Library Online. (SciELO), from 2017 to 2020. The following descriptors were used according to the Health Science Descriptors (DeCs\MeSH): “Palliative care”, “Home care”, “Elderly” and “Telemedicine” interconnected by the Boolean operator “AND”, after applying the filters: full text, published in the last five years, in Portuguese, English and Spanish, 9 articles were selected. Results and discussion: The selected researches showed relevant data on the importance of telemedicine as an aid to palliative care in geriatric patients, as it allows the facilitation of health-related services, including direct medical care, patient education, health information and self-care by through telecommunications and digital communication technologies, in addition to assisting caregivers in the necessary actions. This form of assistance using digital resources was of paramount importance in the COVID-19 pandemic, as the elderly population, especially in palliative care, was more vulnerable to the disease. This way, telemedicine allowed palliative care to be facilitated, respecting social distancing and continuity of care, even virtually. Despite the discussion about the importance of this care tool in many countries such as the United States of America, Mexico and the United Kingdom, the literature on this topic was limited in Brazil. Conclusion: In view of the importance of palliative care and telemedicine as a facilitator of this service, it is inferred the need to develop measures of awareness and accessibility of the population to digital media, training of professionals and dissemination of

the benefits of telemedicine so that it is better disseminated in Brazil.

Keywords: Palliative care; Seniors; Telemedicine; Home assistance.

INTRODUCTION

Palliative care for geriatric patients is of paramount importance in improving quality of life, as it allows for a new perception and understanding of the disease, in addition to improving mood and relieving physical and emotional pain in this period of end-of-life care (CHUA et al. al., 2019; PALMA et al., 2021). New models of care delivery, such as telemedicine, have the potential to increase access and efficient use of limited palliative care resources in a patient-centered manner (LINS et al., 2019; WU et al., 2020; CHÁVARRI-GUERRA et al., 2021; PALMA et al., 2021; STOCKDILL et al., 2021; RAINSFORD; DYKGRAAF; PHILLIPS, 2022; MACKEY et al., 2022).

Telemedicine is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the provision of services related to health care, in cases where distance is a critical factor. The main services provided by health professionals use information and communication technology (WOH, 2010).

This communication tool can assist in the provision of palliative care from the delivery and facilitation of health-related services, including direct medical care, patient education, health information services and self-care through telecommunications and digital communication technologies (CHUA et al. al., 2019; STOCKDILL et al., 2021). In particular, telemedicine can be useful for caregivers, improving access to palliative care for patients' loved ones, allowing communication between various family members and care staff, and reducing the burden of face-to-face clinical visits (CHÁVARRI-GUERRA et al. al., 2021; PALMA et al., 2021).

The use of digital resources as a facilitator of health services has never been as discussed as it is today (MACKEY et al., 2022; RAINSFORD; DYKGRAAF; PHILLIPS, 2022). Since March 2020, the world health scenario has changed when the WHO declared the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020). The arrival of this new reality has led to a rapid transformation of health care from a traditional outpatient model to a technological assistance model in many countries (STOCKDILL et al., 2021). This challenge extended to healthcare professionals who face ethical challenges and dilemmas when caring for terminally ill patients, finding the most appropriate management solution requires communication between patients, caregivers and multidisciplinary medical teams (WU et al., 2020).

Given the above and with the purpose of deepening the content on telemedicine in palliative care, this work aims to investigate the importance of telemedicine as an aid to palliative care in geriatric patients.

METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as an integrative literature review. Criteria were established to carry out the construction of this work: identification and delimitation of the theme; creation of the guiding question and the research objective; establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; comparison of the main results and synthesis of the main results found.

The guiding question that supported the construction of this research was: How can telemedicine help in palliative care for the elderly? Data collection was carried out in May 2022, at the Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), between April and May 2020. Descriptors were crossed

according to the Health Science Descriptors (DeCs/MeSH): “Palliative care”, “Home care”, “Elderly” and “Telemedicine” associated with the Boolean operator AND.

Initially, a search was carried out in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), which resulted in 40 articles that yielded only 09 articles that met the search. After that, a search was initiated through the Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS), 7 articles of which none responded to the research objective. Finally, a search was carried out in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) which resulted in 02 articles, which were not selected because they were duplicates. Then, 09 studies were obtained after reading and detailed synthesis of the main information contained in the articles.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The advancement of information and communication technology such as computers, internet and cell phones are revolutionizing the way individuals relate and exchange information (LINS et al., 2019). In this context, as a potential resource for equity in health, telemedicine stands out. This health service tool allows patient monitoring, exchange of medical information and analysis of results from different exams (MACKEY et al., 2022).

Telemedicine, which provides health services through communication technologies, is an option to reduce inequalities in access to specialized health services in rural, remote and regional areas (RAINSFORD; DYKGRAAF; PHILLIPS, 2022). However, take-up of this feature has often been slow due to limited reliable infrastructure and support and concerns regarding cybersecurity and relationship (LINS et al. 2019).

Access to this service, in particular, became even more important for the elderly population in the 2019 coronavirus

pandemic, especially those who needed palliative care (WU et al., 2020; PALMA et al., 2021; STOCKDILL et al., 2021; MACKEY et al., 2022; RAINSFORD; DYKGRAAF; PHILLIPS, 2022). During this period, older individuals are disproportionately affected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with a higher risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and mortality. The arrival of this disease led to a rapid transformation of healthcare from a traditional outpatient model to a telemedicine model (STOCKDILL et al., 2021; MACKEY et al., 2022).

This way, hospitals had to adapt the provision of health services, prioritizing intensive and sometimes prolonged care interventions, with the objective of caring for these people (CHÁVARRI-GUERRA et al., 2021) who did not always result in cure, requiring an approach that sought to support the suffering of the patient and his family. According to the WHO, palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, by preventing and alleviating suffering, through early identification, impeccable assessment and the treatment of pain and other physical, psychosocial and spiritual problems (World Health Organization, 2020). The need for special care and a multidisciplinary team at this stage can be essential to promote the patient's quality of life (FLORÊNCIO et al., 2020).

Palliative care teams have had to face the challenge of how to safely provide hospital-centered care for people with palliative needs (PALMA et al., 2021). Given this context, teams have turned to technology to deliver essential medical care, this innovative method of service delivery has been seen as a viable and useful resource with the potential to improve clinical effectiveness. Thus, telemedicine is increasingly used to provide palliative care

in remote locations with limited access to medical services and in hospitalized patients to facilitate conversations about care goals (CHUA et al., 2019; CHEUNG et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the eligibility criteria, the final sample of this review consisted of 9 publications, which were evaluated taking into account the authors, the year of publication, the title, the database/virtual library in which they were found, as well as the journal. publication, which addressed the theme "Importance of telemedicine as an aid in palliative care for elderly patients".

From their analysis, it was found that the prevailing language was English with nine (100%) articles. Regarding the year of publication, it was found that the variation was from 2019 to 2022, with a higher prevalence in the year 2021 with five (55.5%) articles. Followed by 2019 and 2022, which presented two (22.2%) articles, respectively. Finally, 2020 with one article (11.1%).

As for the indexing database, it was observed that there was a predominance of the National Library of Medicine (MEDLINE) with nine (100%) of the articles. The journal found in greater proportion was the Journal of Palliative Medicine with two (22.2%) articles published. Followed by the journals Oncologist, Clinical Gerontologist, Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, Aust J. Rural Health, Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing, Nursing outlook, JMIR Mhealth Uhealth with one (11.1%) indexed article, respectively.

Regarding the types of epidemiological studies, it was observed that there was a higher prevalence of the pilot observational study type with three (33.3%) articles, followed by the integrative review and efficacy research with two (22.2%) studies, in addition to cross-sectional studies, clinical trials with one (11.1%) article, respectively.

The topic about the importance of telemedicine as an aid to palliative care in elderly patients needs to be better explored, in order to discuss and raise awareness of the assistance and approach that can use technological resources in their favor. Thus, allowing users better familiarity and security to use this new means of service delivery, demonstrating its benefits and reach. Thus, the number of scientific articles found in order to answer the guiding questions of this research is considered scarce.

Notably, the countries that published the most about the importance and effectiveness of this service to provide access to health were the United States of America, United Kingdom and Mexico, they demonstrated through differentiated approaches how beneficial telemedicine can be for the elderly who need palliative care, especially during the pandemic period. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the literature in Portuguese was limited with this theme, suggesting that in Brazil the implementation of telemedicine still needs to be better discussed in order to achieve acceptance by the population.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Palliative care for the elderly is essential, especially in the pandemic period, the need for differentiated care has become increasingly evident. Health managers facing crowded hospitals had to incorporate interdisciplinary palliative approaches and the use of technological resources to promote the necessary care for this age group and their specific needs. In this scenario, the use of telemedicine has rapidly transformed the way care is provided to patients, and most components of palliative care can be provided virtually.

This technological resource can promote mental health care and palliative care, following social distancing norms, allowing

the non-exposure of these patients who are vulnerable to opportunistic diseases, such as COVID-19. This way, telemedicine is increasingly becoming a viable alternative, despite the fact that there are still limitations in accepting this service, to promote health care for the elderly. In the search for better acceptance of this service, it is necessary to develop protocols that address the local needs of each region and better dissemination of the benefits of this assistance proposal, especially in developing countries such as Brazil.

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