

## **WHATSAPP AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE DISTANCE UROLOGY CARE AND FOLLOW-UP OF SPINAL CORD INJURY (SCI) PATIENTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.**

### Hypothesis / aims of study

Most of SCI patients fail to regularly follow for urological care for the reasons such as lack of awareness, poor guidance, economic issues and distances to travel. Failure to follow predisposes them to greater risk of complications and adversely affects quality of life. We reviewed the role of WhatsApp as a tool to enhance the distance care and follow-up in SCI patients.

### Study design, materials and methods

We reviewed the use of Instant messaging service such as WhatsApp, an encrypted freeware communication tool, in improving the urological care of SCI patients. Team of 4 urology nurses accessed patients on WhatsApp and requested for their participation. They were encouraged to fill in a questionnaire and share their queries and concerns for prompt resolution by qualified nurse counselors. They were also asked leading questions about their urological health. At the end of one year, they filled in a survey form sharing their experience.

### Results

We approached 840 patients through WhatsApp, of whom 720 patients agreed to participate. 600 patients stayed in active contact till the end of study while 120 patients dropped out.

WhatsApp was used to schedule appointments and send reminders. 40% of patients followed in-person. Remaining 60% of patients filled in the given proforma and actively shared their relevant concerns. We received about 20 queries daily. About 70% queries were received during work-hours, while 30% during off- hours and on holidays. During the year, 6754 routine and 546 emergent concerns were received. Common queries were failure to catheterize, hematuria, fever, autonomic dysreflexia, catheter blockage and urine leaks. Mainly text messages were used; however pictures and direct talk were often helpful. We could directly resolve 72 % of queries successfully.

At final survey, 85% patients found the service valuable and expressed their wish to continue using it.

### Interpretation of results

Instant messaging technology such as WhatsApp is a useful tool to provide distance-care and follow-up of SCI patients. Its main advantages are familiarity and ease of use, free access and round the clock availability.

### Concluding message

Technology can fill in the gaps of our routine healthcare system in a cost-effective and patient-friendly manner.

### Disclosures

**Funding:** none **Clinical Trial:** No **Subjects:** HUMAN **Ethics not Req'd:** it was retrospective review of patient care data **Helsinki:** Yes **Informed Consent:** Yes