

COVID-19, Deferred Care and Telemedicine: A Problem, A Solution and a Potential Opportunity

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many health systems to proactively reduce care delivery to prepare for an expected surge of hospitalizations. There have been concerns that care deferral may have negative health effects and hopes telemedicine could provide a viable alternative. We found deferred care is widespread – nearly half of respondents deferred care – but it was largely for preventive services, particularly dental and primary care, and did not cause concern about negative health effects. A quarter of those who delayed care were concerned about the health effects, with needs centered around orthopedics and surgery. Telemedicine was viewed more positively than prior to the pandemic and was overwhelmingly viewed as a viable option to deliver deferred care, particularly by those over age 65, female and college educated. Mental health services stood out for high levels of deferred care, concern about the effect of the deferral on health and willingness to receive care via telemedicine.

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