Program evaluation of a telepsychiatry service for older adults connecting a university-affiliated geriatric center to a rural psychogeriatric outreach service in Northwest Ontario, Canada.

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Source

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Abstract

ABSTRACT Background: Weekly telepsychiatry consultations have been provided since 2002 to six communities in Northwest Ontario. Staff from a single community psychogeriatric outreach service who work within these communities facilitate the referrals. Methods: The program evaluation included (a) a chart review of the last 100 referrals, (b) analysis of patient and staff evaluations, (c) a survey mailed to all physicians in referring communities, and (d) three focus groups of staff working in local community agencies. Results: The mean age at the time of consultation was 76.7 years. Sixty-eight percent of patients were females. The most frequent diagnoses were dementia (54%), depression (28%), and mild cognitive impairment (19%). The most frequent medication recommendations were antidepressants or cholinesterase inhibitors. Two hundred ninety-four patient assessments and case consultations were carried out between 2002 and 2009. Post-session evaluation surveys rated the provision of information, whether objectives were met, and overall usefulness of recommendations. The mean scores for these questions on a 5-point scale were between 4.6 and 4.85. Referring physicians were confident and satisfied with the recommendations made for their patients. All planned to continue to use telepsychiatry as a care option for the future. The focus groups added useful information about challenges and potential barriers to utilizing the program. Conclusions: The program was rated as being highly valued across all modalities of evaluation. Members of the referring team believe that access to a geriatric psychiatrist has broadened the team's knowledge base, its use of assessment tools, and increased their ability to better construct their patients' treatment plans.

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