I. Introduction

Online counseling, telepsychiatry, and other telemedical services are ubiquitous in today’s health services market. Research has demonstrated that online services are enthusiastically utilized by consumers who are deaf. We conducted a survey of individuals with a variety of disabilities to assess the acceptability of telehealth services to these populations.

II. Population

In Ohio, individuals applying for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services (n = 93) were asked to complete an online survey to determine their interest in participating in online VR services. 39% had multiple disabilities.

III. Procedure

Individuals, from Southwest Ohio, who applied for VR services (n=93) were asked about interest in telehealth services and their access to a computer and internet connection. The VR counselor asked the consumer at their initial meeting if the consumer was interested in receiving online VR services. If they were not interested, we asked them to explain why not. We asked the consumer if interested but had no access to Online VR services, what were the reasons they had no access.

IV. Results

**Consumers Interested in Engaging in Online VR Services by Primary Disability Category**

- No: 79%
- Deaf/hard of hearing: 21%
- Mobility: 2%
- Learning Disability: 2%
- Vision: 2%
- Mental Health: 2%
- Medical: 1%
- ID: 1%
- TBI: 1%
- Intellectual Disability: 1%
- Developmental Disability: 2%

Of the 93 consumers, 79% were not interested in engaging in Online VR services. 21% were interested, lead by people who were Deaf/hard of hearing, followed by consumers with mental health issues.

**Consumers with Multiple Disabilities**

- Yes: 39%
- No: 61%

**Consumer is Interested but Has No Access to Online VR Services**

- No computer access in home: 33%
- No Internet Access: 17%
- No Internet and computer access in home: 50%

IV. Results Continued

100% of Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals, 40% of individuals with mobility-related disabilities, 50% of individuals with medical disabilities, and 29% of individuals with a mental health disability were interested in online services.

**Chief Reasons for Refusing Telehealth Services**

- Not interested: 15%
- Cognitive Inability: 15%
- Dislike of Computers: 25%
- Prefer face-to-face meetings: 27%
- No Access to Computer/Internet: 18%
- No Internet Access: 17%
- No computer access in home: 33%

V. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that telehealth services are not universally acceptable to all populations, especially those with certain disabilities. Individuals who are deaf are accustomed to using videophones, and the leap to online counseling and other telehealth services is a simple move for them. However, most individuals with disabilities are not comfortable with receiving telehealth services. The study also reaffirms that a technology gap/digital divide for people with disabilities continues to exist in the 21st century.

From the Pew Research Center, Internet, Science & Tech, January 21, 2011, states 54% of adults living with a disability use the Internet, compared with 81% of adults without a disability. It reports people living with disability, once they are online, are also less likely than other Internet users to have high-speed access or wireless access.

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