

Actions of a Brazilian public telehealth service to help coping with the new coronavirus

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Background:

In January/2020 the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus was declared as an international public health emergency. In Brazil, until June 22nd there were 1,11 million confirmed cases. In this context, the Telehealth Network of Minas Gerais (TNMG), a large-scale public telehealth service, acted quickly to assist professionals and the population in coping with the disease, mainly in low resource settings.

Aim:

To report the experience of a Brazilian public telehealth service in actions to manage COVID-19 and its impacts.

Methods:

Experience report.

Results:

The TNMG developed 15 infographics and 16 web lectures for health professionals and general population about key themes, such as respiratory syndromes, personal care and ventilatory support. Two of them were live, seen in real time by 13,422 professionals, mainly nurses (63.8%) and doctors (31.1%), from 45 medical specialties (most family physicians-34.0%), in all Brazilian states, especially the Southeast region (58.5%). All lectures were uploaded on TNMG's Youtube channel, each one reaching 5,300 viewers on average. Specific to support health professionals: 2 guidelines were developed - one for primary care units and other to emergency/intensive care; a category for offline (second opinion) teleconsultations was created for doubts about coronavirus; and a list with 39 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) was developed. For the general population: 65 FAQs were developed; a health team from a low resource setting was trained to provide online teleconsultations; and a chatbot was released to automatically answer COVID-19 related doubts and/or evaluate a user's health condition, indicating if emergency medical care was needed. All resources are freely available on TNMG's website and on its social networks.

Conclusions:

Telehealth tools had a notable acceptance and were shown to be an effective way to disseminate information for professionals and lay population throughout the country.

Key messages:

- Telehealth tools have been proven to be an effective strategy to promote health education, for both professionals and the general population.
- Telemedicine plays a fundamental role on dealing with public health issues, especially on low resource settings.