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Mind the digital gap: ophthalmology specific determinants for digital exclusion

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Purpose:

- Whilst teleophthalmology has improved access to eye-care in wake of the coronavirus pandemic, there are growing concerns some patients may be excluded from capitalising on its benefits.
- Understanding barriers and user perspectives are pivotal to achieving widespread adoption.
- The aim of our study was to explore determinants influencing patients' access and motivation for utilising teleophthalmology.

Methods:

- A 15-item questionnaire was distributed to patients attending face-to-face (F2F) appointments or video-consultations (VC) at Moorfields Eye Hospital, London, UK.
- Questions explored participants' access to technology, digital literacy skills, confidence online and other factors determining their use of VC.
- The UK Government Digital Inclusion Strategy policy paper [1] was used as a framework for the development of questions.
- Anonymised responses were collected and analysed.

Results:

- Responses were obtained from a total of 92 patients (F2F n=63, VC n=29).
- Key findings revealed an overall 2.2% did not have access to any device.
- 6.3% of the F2F cohort reported never having used the internet.
- 41.3% of patients in the VC group and 22.2% of patients in the F2F group were under the age of 35 years
- One of the significant deterrents for attending VC was low confidence in its diagnostic proficiency (30.4% of all patients).
- Training sessions run in local communities were identified to be a popular tool to improve digital engagement, particularly in the older demographic (27.8% of patients aged ≥65y) as well as having more information available on VC.

Figure 1:

Proportion of different ethnicities in F2F and VC group

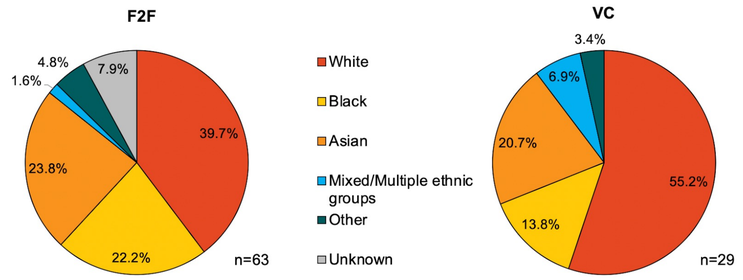
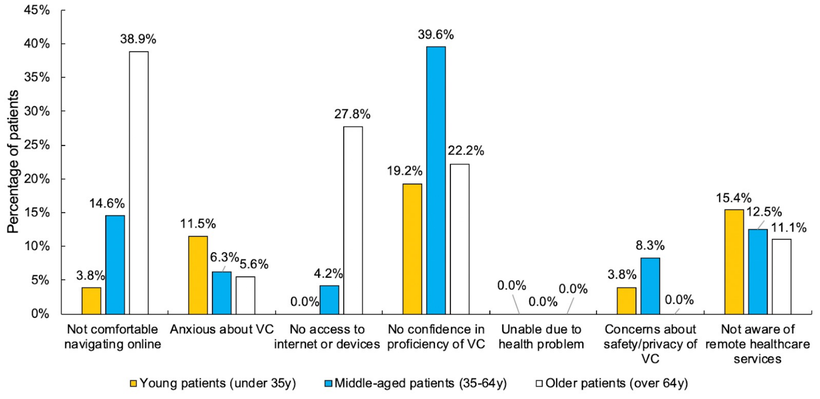


Figure 2: Barriers to video consultation by age groups

Older patients were less comfortable navigating online and were more likely to lack access to internet or devices required to join VC.



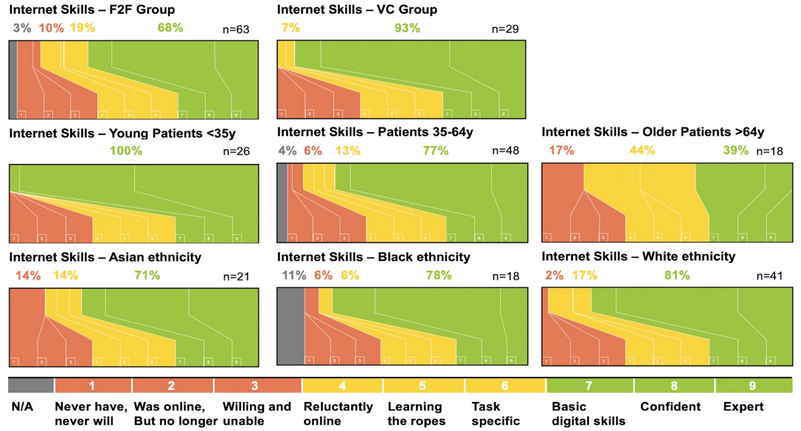
References:

[1]. UK Government. Policy paper: Government Digital Inclusion Strategy [Internet]. 2014 [cited 2022 Mar 27]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy

[2]. Kapadia D, Zhang J, Salway S, et al. Ethnic Inequalities in Healthcare: A rapid evidence review - NHS Race and Health Observatory [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2022 Mar 27]. Available from: https://www.nhsrho.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/RHO-Rapid-Review-Final-Report_v.7.pdf

Figure 3: Internet skills by study, age and ethnicity groups

Patients in the VC group, younger patients and patients of White ethnicity had higher levels of internet skills



Conclusion:

- This study found older patients at higher risk of digital exclusion due to poorer access and lower digital competency.
- Our data showed less confidence in internet use amongst those who identified as being from Black or Asian backgrounds. This aspect of ethnic inequality in digital access was also noted in the recently published Ethnic Inequalities in Healthcare report by the NHS Race and Health Observatory [2]. Further work into the specific reasons for the ethnic disparity is required, but nonetheless it shows specific communities within our patient group that require additional digital inclusion support measures.
- Lack of digital skills, poor access to technology and low confidence in digital healthcare must be addressed to ensure that certain patient subgroups do not miss out on the benefits of teleophthalmology.
- Patients have expressed interest in solutions such as digital skills workshops (delivered in the hospital or the community) and schemes to enhance access to the internet and devices.

Commercial Relationships Disclosure for this project:
No Commercial Relationship

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