

Telemedicine for chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders - a patient perspective

2. Qualitative methods

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Background

International research on telemedicine for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders (COPD) shows telemedicine to be clearly beneficial to this patient group. Most importantly, telemedicine creates increased patient security and prevents hospitalizations and rehospitalizations, leading to both financial and resource-related savings. However, there is a lack of qualitative studies that reflect the patient perspective. This study presents the results of a qualitative study in which patients with COPD were exposed to a telemedicine intervention.

Aim

The aim was to gain knowledge about how patients with COPD experienced being in asynchronous telemedical contact with the lung clinic, and what influence this had on their quality of life.

Methods

The study was a qualitative phenomenological study. Twelve interviews were collected in the patients' homes. The informants were over 60 years of age, and both men and women participated. Patients suffered from COPD stage 3 or 4 according to Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) criteria. All interviews were recorded by a Dictaphone, verbatim transcribed in their entirety and validated by both authors. The interview guide was qualified in advance with a PPI interview.

Results

The study shows that patients feel reassured by the possibility of getting in touch with the hospital as soon as the first symptoms of pneumonia manifest and appreciate not having to wait for consultation or treatment. It is the immediacy of this relationship which alleviates the anxiety and worry that are a consequence of suffering with COPD in GOLD stage 3 and 4. The patients themselves or their relatives were experienced in the use of telemedicine. The processes of mediation and transformation cause patients to assume a changed role with responsibility for managing the illness shifting to the patient. Patients thereby assume responsibility for their own life situation.

Conclusion

Patients believe that telemedicine has a positive impact on their quality of life, because they can quickly get in touch with the hospital via telemedicine. They value synchronous contact by telephone the most. Patients take full responsibility for their own situation, but when the disease progresses, telemedicine seems to fail to capture adequately the decline in daily function.