

Do Video House Calls with a Specialist Help Get Care to People with Parkinson's Disease?

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What was the research about?

Nearly 1 million people in the United States have Parkinson's disease. People with Parkinson's disease may have poor balance or shaking in their hands, legs, or faces. These symptoms often get worse over time. Many patients don't live near a doctor with special training to treat this disease. As the disease gets worse, it gets harder for patients to travel to see a specialist. Caregivers often travel with patients.

The research team wanted to learn if video house calls with specialists were convenient and improved quality of life for people with Parkinson's disease. The team also wanted to learn if video house calls improved quality of care, reduced travel time, and reduced burden on caregivers due to the demands of care.

What were the results?

The research team found that video house calls were a convenient way for people with Parkinson's disease to get care from specialists. Most patients reported being satisfied or very satisfied with care they received during video house calls.

After 12 months, the team didn't find any differences between patients who received video house calls and those who didn't in quality of life, quality of care, or amount of caregiver burden.

Compared with patients who had in-person visits at clinics, patients who used video house calls spent less time traveling to doctor visits. Patients who used video

house calls also spent more time talking with specialists during visits.

Who was in the study?

The study included 195 adults with Parkinson's disease and 111 of their caregivers. The average patient age was 66. Patients had had Parkinson's disease for an average of eight years.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned people with Parkinson's disease to one of two groups by chance. Both groups received educational materials and care from their regular doctors. One group of patients also talked to a specialist up to four times through video house calls. Patients received a link to download secure software for video house calls. The research team gave webcams to patients who didn't have them. Specialists sent recommendations for care to patients' regular doctors.

The research team asked patients if the video house calls were convenient. The team also asked patients in both groups about their quality of life and if they were satisfied with their care. The research team then asked caregivers about the burden of being a caregiver. The team also kept track of how much time patients in the study spent getting to their visits and talking with their doctors.

What were the limits of the study?

The number of patients in the study was small. Also, patients in the study had higher levels of education and greater access to specialists than many patients with Parkinson's disease do. Future studies could look at the benefits of video house calls for patients with Parkinson's disease or other health conditions who lack access to specialists.

Patients in the study needed to have basic computer skills and an internet connection to set up the video house calls. Also, some states may not be able to use video house calls because of laws about doctors from

other states providing care using video calls. In states with these laws, patients may have trouble setting up video house calls with specialists.

How can people use the results?

Patients with Parkinson's disease or those who care for them could ask their regular doctors about using video house calls to meet with a specialist. Video house calls may not be available in some parts of the country.

To learn more about this project, visit pcori.org/Dorsey041.