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A Qualitative Exploration of Internal Medicine Resident Experiences with Telemedicine During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Telemedicine has become the cornerstone of health care delivery in the COVID-19 pandemic, as it allows patients to be cared for at a distance. This descriptive qualitative study sought to (1) explore internal medicine resident experiences with telehealth patient encounters during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) understand resident experiences with virtually reviewing cases with their supervisors. From November 2020 to March 2021, the authors conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with internal medicine residents who have completed ambulatory rotations such as endocrinology. Perceived benefits in patient encounters included increased efficiency. Challenges included a deficiency of nonverbal cues to use for building rapport with patients and confirming their understanding, inability to confidently form an impression of a patient and their disease severity, the lack of physical examination, and technical audio-visual challenges. While most residents preferred in-person to virtual review with their supervisors, the benefits of the virtual review included a supportive learning environment, and a high level of autonomy for senior residents. However, residents felt that feedback over a virtual platform was generic and not constructive, and junior trainees did not have opportunities to observe staff demonstrate essential skills needed for telemedicine care.

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