

The Need for Implementation of Effective Telepsychiatry Services in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Most Nigerians with mental health challenges and illnesses lack quality treatment because of the shortage of psychiatrists in Nigeria and the population of Nigeria is around 200 million, making it the most populated Black nation [1]. But there is shortage of psychiatrists to provide effective mental healthcare services in the densely populated West African country; the psychiatrist–patient quotient in Nigeria is appalling, consequently hindering effective mental healthcare delivery in Nigeria [1]. There are about 200 registered psychiatrists currently listed to practice in Nigeria; this means that one psychiatrist is meant to cater for the mental health of one million Nigerians [1].

There is a need to implement effective telepsychiatry services in Nigeria, mostly through video communication, and this can be achieved through computer-based platforms, unique mobile-based apps, Skype, and WhatsApp. [2]. The implementation of telepsychiatry services in Nigeria, most especially in this era of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), will increase the accessibility of mental healthcare services in Nigeria, filling the lacunae of the shortage of mental healthcare personnel in Nigerian hospitals, because through telepsychiatry, mental healthcare service delivery will be faster, and the physicians will have lesser risk of contracting COVID-19 [3]. COVID-19 poses a serious challenge to mental healthcare delivery worldwide. Telepsychiatry should be used to assist mental healthcare personnel to cater for the mental health needs of Nigerians who have mental issues and who require constant interactions with their physicians due to their present health condition [3]. Telepsychiatry contributes to effective mental healthcare in developed countries in this era of COVID-19 pandemic, and it can be used in many ways; telepsychiatry is an actual and viable platform for safe practice to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in hospitals [2-4]. Telepsychiatry fills the communication gap between patients, psychiatrists, mental healthcare providers, and the health organizations. It is a platform through which patients with mental illness who tested positive for COVID-19 can interact with their psychiatrists from home through the Internet, thereby minimizing the spread of COVID-19. through this platform,

medications can be recommended to patients, or alternatively medicines can be delivered to patients at home [5]. Moreover, patients' caregivers can as well be integrated into the system for effective healthcare delivery. Substantial limitations of implementing effective telepsychiatry services in Nigeria are (a) inadequate power supply both at homes and in hospitals and (b) lack of telemedicine facilities in primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare institutions in Nigeria, because most Nigerian hospitals and physicians do not have the facilities and expertise to deliver telepsychiatry services.

In conclusion, a need exists to implement and support telepsychiatry services in Nigeria, both by the public and private sectors. Moreover, the Nigerian government should invest in mental healthcare delivery, by equipping healthcare facilities with the latest technology system, encouraging young doctors to specialize in psychiatry, and training mental health personnel in telepsychiatry, in such a way that office appointment could be substituted with telehealth consultation in the era of COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial Support and Sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest in writing this letter.

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Received: Jan. 6, 2021 revised: Jan. 24, 2021 accepted: Jan. 25, 2021
date published: Mar. 25, 2021

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Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.e-tjp.org
	DOI: 10.4103/TPSY.TPSY_10_21

How to cite this article: Okechukwu CE. The need for implementation of effective telepsychiatry services in the era of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. *Taiwan J Psychiatry* 2021;35:44-5.

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