



Background

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on all health services. Within our own service, all face-to-face neurology clinics were cancelled from March 20th 2020, due to increasing clinical demands, staff redeployment, and exposure risk to patients. Telephone reviews were initiated as an alternative, and the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) team embraced this method to provide continuity of care.

Objective

To assess patient satisfaction with virtual telephone clinics during the pandemic, influencing factors on this, and future utility.

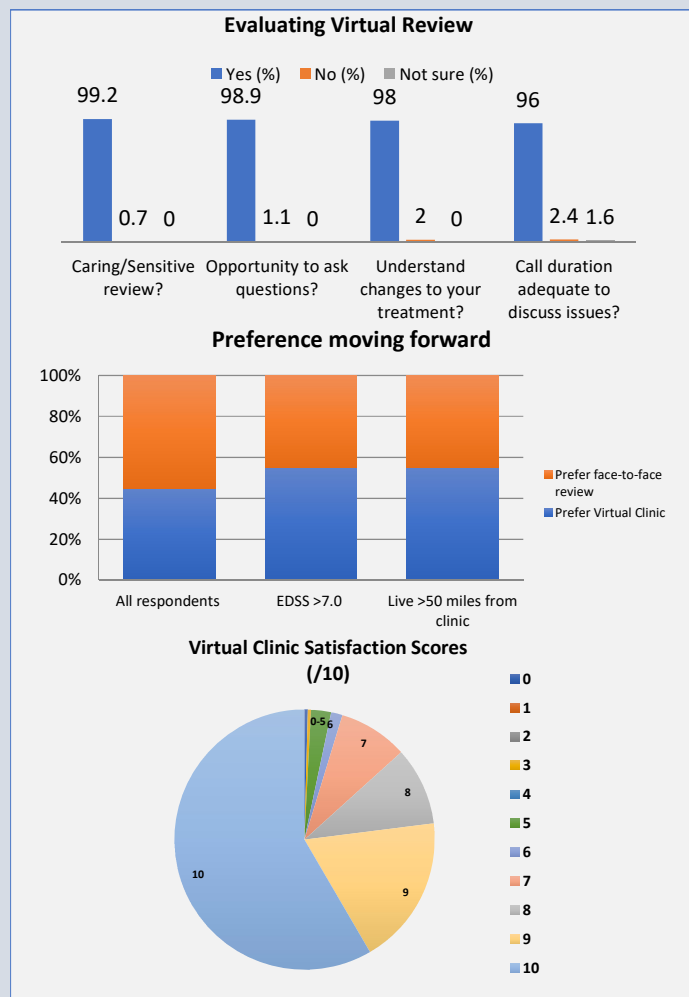
Design/Methods

We developed a postal questionnaire for patients receiving telephone review from an MS consultant or clinical fellow, March to July 2020. Ultimately, 635 anonymised questionnaires were posted to patients. Data analysis deployed both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Results

279 (44%) questionnaires were returned. The mean age of respondents was 49, 72% were female, 28% male. 86% had an Expanded Disability status scale (EDSS) score of <7.0.

Using a numerical rating scale (0-10, 10= completely satisfied), 95% of patients reported an overall satisfaction score of ≥7 (pie chart). Thematic analysis revealed several commonly cited reasons in support of one of: face-to-face or virtual review (see table).



Results

99% of patients found the clinical interaction by telephone to be caring/sensitive (Graph 1). 96% felt the duration of the call was adequate to cover their issues. 99% felt their virtual review allowed ample opportunity to ask questions. In those with a change in management plan, 98% felt they had a clear understanding of this change over telephone. 87% of patients preferred virtual review to face-to-face during the pandemic. 45% of patients expressed preference for use of virtual review moving forward, rising to 55% in subsets with EDSS >7 or living >50 miles from the MS clinic. 54% felt video calling would further improve virtual review.

| Themes in support of virtual review | Themes in support of face-to-face review |
|--|--|
| <i>I felt safer not attending clinic during pandemic</i> | <i>Examination is a crucial part of my care</i> |
| <i>I felt comfortable to discuss issues whilst at home</i> | <i>I am a new patient and am keen to meet my consultant</i> |
| <i>I live a long drive from clinic</i> | <i>Face-to-face is crucial when I have new symptoms or am feeling unwell</i> |
| <i>My partner/family can more easily join the call</i> | |

Conclusions

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, overall satisfaction is high with virtual MS clinic review.
- Virtual review offers patients an effective interface with their MS clinician across a range of themes.
- Strong patient preference exists for virtual review during an ongoing pandemic.
- Preference for ongoing virtual review post-pandemic exists for some but not all patients, based on factors such as disability and geography

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