

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TELEMEDICINE

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Measures of successful telemedicine projects include reduced referrals, increased access to services, cost benefits and improved communications between primary, secondary and tertiary care. Yet such successes are no guarantee that projects will make the transition from the pilot stage to a successful long term service solution. Continued failure of these projects to sustain past the pilot stage and to form part of 'normal' service delivery has meant that the true potential of many have yet to be realised. Objectives: The aim of this research is to explore factors that attribute to the sustainability of telemedicine projects in order to identify potential relationships and their importance at various stages during a projects lifecycle. Methods: A review of the literature was performed to identify and collect data concerning sustainability factors. A cross sectional survey was developed based on 12 factors identified in the review: Funding, Integration, Support, Policies, Training, Change to Professional Responsibilities, Goals, Evaluation, Planning, Collaboration, Recognition and Expertise. The self administered survey has been issued to project leads of both pilot projects as well as those that have been incorporated into service delivery across the UK. Results: Preliminary results indicate that while all sustainability factors may be present, funding, integration, support and planning are highly correlated to the successful continuation of a program and can be seen as key predictors of success. Conclusions: Consideration of each of these factors in the planning stages could reduce the delay and cancellation of a project together with its benefits. A sustainability framework is presented for discussion.

Keywords: Telemedicine, Sustainability, Health, Success