Reviewer's report

Title: Video conferencing versus telephone calls for team work across hospitals: A qualitative study on simulated emergencies

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Reviewer: Patrick Cregan

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes a qualitative study of team work assessing videoconferencing versus standard telephone communication for support of a distant site by a central teaching hospital with multi player teams at each end. The team to team aspect is what principally sets it apart from other studies of this sort and is the real value in the study.

There are a number of problems with the methodology which limit its utility however and are reflected in the comments in the text which seem to show confusion as a major problem.

First there are some technical aspects:

The use of standard commercial videoconferencing technologies although relatively modern it is not state of the art) creates problems

1. With audio quality as insufficient echo cancellation in a multi player scenario can be a major cause of distraction for both teams

2. Compression/Decompression of the signal leads to latency which can be very disruptive to the creation of clinically effective telepresence (as opposed to the use of second generation or ultrabroadband with nil or minimally compressed frames)

3. The lack of real time vital signs monitoring was clearly an impediment and since this represents only a small data stream provision of it is essential to effective use of the system.

Next, the lack (15 minutes training only) of pre-training and familiarisation with the new system versus years of experience with telephone communication is problematic for any valid comparison.

Acknowledging that this is a qualitative study the large slabs of comment make it hard to discern consistent themes in the findings. Is it possible to collate some of these into tabular form?

The team to team scenario telemedicine scenario needs to be further investigated but this is a start in that direction

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have worked on development of a telemedicine system the ViCCU project referred to in the references in this paper (refs 5,15)