Expanding Support for Breastfeeding Mothers Using In-Home Telehealth Technology
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Problem and Evidence: Increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration rates is recognized as a national health priority. Support for breastfeeding in the first few weeks of postpartum period is associated with increased breastfeeding rates. However, there is limited access to lactation consultants (LC) for new mothers, especially in underserved rural and urban communities. Telehealth technologies can bridge the gap between these high need populations and the poor access to professional lactation care. At present, the use of telehealth for assessing and supporting breastfeeding in postpartum women has not been adequately explored.

Strategy and Practice Change: This study is to explore the feasibility of using in-home audio/video telehealth equipment for assessing and providing breastfeeding support in women’s homes. The perceptions of women who receive breastfeeding support via telehealth will also be evaluated.

Evaluation: A descriptive study design will include a convenient sample of 10 mother-baby dyads recruited from a maternity unit of a university affiliated hospital and a birthing center in a Midwestern city. Two methods of collecting breastfeeding data - videoconferencing by the telehealth LC and face-to-face by home visit LC nurse using the LATCH scores, will be observed over 4 weeks postpartum. Subject enrollment and data collection are in progress. Data collected by the telehealth LC and home visit LC nurses will be compared to calculate a percentage of agreement. Participants’ perceptions and comments about the telehealth visits will be tabulated.

Results, Recommendations, & Lessons Learned: Results of this study will provide evidence for using the telehealth service to facilitate access to breastfeeding support and recommend whether data collected over telehealth are reliable. The results of this study will be used to further test specific interventions for mothers in rural and/or disadvantaged populations who have limited-access to breastfeeding support. Lessons learned from this study will be presented.

Keywords: Breastfeeding support, telehealth, telemedicine, lactation support