



TELEDERMATOLOGY

TELEDERMATOLOGY IN GERMANY: IS THE RURAL POPULATION OPEN FOR IT?

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Introduction: Teledermatology has a great potential to increase specialist health care in rural regions. Previous research has shown that teledermatology can decrease the number of face-to-face visits needed per patient, resulting in less traveling times and shorter waiting times for patients. Thus, teledermatology can be especially beneficial for older people with decreased mobility and patients with chronic skin, who need closely monitored medical care.

Objective: To measure the willingness to use teledermatologic services in the rural German population on the example of a Bavarian rural population and to assess major concerns related to teledermatology.

Materials and Methods: Cross-sectional study. The data was collected both as part of a health survey in the Bavarian Forest Region (Q1/2017) and a follow up survey (Q1/2018) conducted in a cohort recruited at a Bavarian agriculture festival. In a standardized paper questionnaire, participants stated whether they would be willing to send a picture of skin rashes or skin changes to their dermatologist via the internet and if 'no', why not.

Results: In total, the data of 1,116 Bavarian residents was analyzed (mean age 50.2 years, 58.0% female, 80.4% living in rural regions). Of those, 36.6% stated that they would be willing to send photos of skin changes to their dermatologist. Women, older participants and participants living in rural regions were less likely to be willing to use teledermatologic services. Major concerns were impersonality, doubts regarding the diagnostic quality and data protection and privacy concerns.

Conclusion: The majority of the rural German population is not yet willing to use teledermatology. In order for teledermatology to fully unleash its potential, the rural population needs to be educated about the functioning and the benefits of teledermatology and data protection concerns need to be addressed.

