



## EDITORIAL

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**Telepharmacy. Ready for its global implementation?****Telefarmacia. ¿Listos para su implantación global?**

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Information and communication technologies (ICT's) have progressively been introduced into multiple areas of our daily lives. In the professional arena, activities that traditionally required the physical presence of practitioners have benefited from the advent of the new technologies, enjoying a more widespread dissemination and achieving better results. The hospital setting has naturally not been immune to this trend, which has manifested itself in the inception and development of telepharmacy, understood as the administration of pharmaceutical care at a distance through the use of new technologies<sup>1</sup>.

Like telemedicine, telepharmacy is a highly-demanded tool by health-care providers and patients alike<sup>2</sup>. Both are convinced that telepharmacy can maintain—and even improve—current standards of care, increasing the efficiency of the services provided<sup>3</sup>. The benefits of telepharmacy are not limited to enhancing the practitioners' professional performance but also extend to higher standards of patient care, which make a direct contribution to improving their quality of life and humanizing healthcare as a whole. Unfortunately, few studies have been carried out to confirm these intuitive assumptions<sup>4</sup>.

Two articles in this edition of *Farmacia Hospitalaria* discuss the situation of telepharmacy in Spain, and they do so from different points of view<sup>5,6</sup>. Tortajada-Goitia *et al.* present and discuss the results of a survey conducted among the members of the Spanish Society of Hospital Pharmacists (SEFH)<sup>5</sup>. The survey was aimed at analyzing the implementation and development of telepharmacy services addressed to outpatients by Spanish hospital pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the many findings of this study, we would like to emphasize the data on degree of adoption of telepharmacy, which particularly caught our attention. Before the onset of the health crisis, only 17% of hospital pharmacy departments offered telepharmacy programs that included the delivery of medication. This comes across as a strikingly low figure considering the many perceived benefits associated with telepharmacy and the widespread use and highly-developed regulation of the service in other countries<sup>1,7,10</sup>. On a more positive note, it must be said that during the COVID-19 crisis, over 80% of outpatients in the hospitals participating in the study received their medication through telepharmacy, which attests to the extraordinary ingenuity and resilience of our hospital pharmacy departments.

Although the survey was a fantastic initiative, the results obtained from it must be taken with caution as only a small proportion of the hospitals invited sent back a response. All the same, the study shows that Spanish hospi-

tal pharmacies appear to be prepared to embrace telepharmacy, which means there is no reason why such programs should not continue their expansion beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. It is no less true, however, that there are still some important areas where light still needs to be shed in order to allow for more informed decisions. Although implementation of telepharmacy under the pressure imposed by the pandemic was successful, no data exist on the difficulties faced by hospital pharmacies, the nature of the adaptation process required for successful implementation, or the feasibility of maintaining the service in the medium and long term. It would be very useful to gauge the impact of telepharmacy on treatment adherence and patient satisfaction using patient reported outcomes (PRO) or some other measurement tool as a way of justifying implementation of the service. Other technical aspects such as the criteria used to include patients in a distance-dispensing program or the legal framework that should govern such a program must also be defined so as to extend telepharmacy to as many hospitals and patients as possible.

The second paper on the situation of telepharmacy in our country is SEFH's Position Statement on Telepharmacy<sup>6</sup>. In it, our Society declares itself in favor of telepharmacy as a way of providing specialized pharmaceutical care with full recourse to the currently available ICT's. The purpose is to improve health outcomes without compromising patient safety. This is an excellent piece of work that discusses and develops aspects that are essential to the implementation and development of telepharmacy. Although some of the chapters could have been developed more exhaustively, the document provides specialists with detailed answers to many of their questions on this important subject.

Much progress has been made in the area of telepharmacy. We have learnt that our hospital pharmacy departments are now in a position to apply telepharmacy to outpatient care as they successfully implemented



programs to that effect during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SEFH has drawn up a framework for the implementation and development of telepharmacy programs in Spanish hospitals urging all relevant stakeholders to take an active part in the process. It would now make no sense

to go back to the above-stated meagre 17% of Spanish hospitals running telepharmacy programs before the health crisis. Practitioners and, above all, patients would like to see a gradual yet systematic implementation of telepharmacy services on a global scale.

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