

## The telepatient

**Speakers:** Maria **BESTEIRO**, Deputy Chief Medical Director, Axa Partners | France; Bernard **CASTELLS**, Medical Doctor, University Hospital Center Orléans | France; Cédric **VILLEMENOT**, General Practitioner, Everest Medical | France

**Led by:** Casimiro **VIZZINI**, Medical Doctor, International relations and scientific policies specialist | France

**Teleconsultation: a tool mainly used for benign diseases that allows better access to care to the appropriate population**

The teleconsultation service is an innovation whose initial aim is to facilitate access to healthcare systems to populations disadvantaged by their geographical or socio-economic situations. According to an American study, before the French law “Omnibus”, this tool was mainly used by wealthy young women. This represents an audience of only 10 million people out of the 330 million present, thereby excluding 45 million who were already excluded. In France, teleconsultation is a real added value as it facilitates access to care for a much larger population. It can be used by patients without a referring physician, and by those whose physician is unavailable within a reasonable time or who is even retired. This service can also be useful to active persons with little time to wait at the medical centre’s waiting room, and to vulnerable or disabled people. Diseases treated thanks to teleconsultation services are mainly pulmonary infections, influenza and cystitis. These services are also largely used for prescription renewals. In few cases, teleconsultation services end up with a physical consultation (22%) or a redirection to the Emergency Department (1%).

**Teleconsultation services benefit the patient-doctor relationship to a certain extent**

Since teleconsultation services appeared, the patient-doctor relationship has evolved. This new service may be perceived by some as intrusive as the doctor is invited into the patient’s personal environment. However, it allows for the free expression of the patient who is more comfortable in his/her familiar environment than in the medical practice. Moreover, the reduction in the number of journeys makes teleconsultation services profitable both for the environment and the economy. It also facilitates also exchange of information between patients and doctors and enables orientation of the patient towards appropriate specialists. However, teleconsultation services may have limitations: they are not fit for dealing with conditions such as chronic diseases and multiple pathologies. A large majority of the population remains excluded due to lack of access to digital technologies.

There are some barriers to the deployment of telemedicine. One of those is poor digital literacy, which consists of an individual’s inability to use everyday digital tools. In addition, there is a risk of reducing the quality of medical diagnosis as it only relies on vision and declared symptoms: the doctor cannot make a full clinical evaluation through touching the patient or taking vital signs measurements. Also, in France, physicians cannot carry out more than 20% of their consultations as teleconsultations. This is sometimes inappropriate for specialties such as psychiatry where teleconsultation could represent up to 50% of consultations.

**A diversified telemedicine offer: information, orientation and prevention**

The use of teleconsultation services is booming with a clear increase in the volume of patients. This evolution follows a change in patients’ expectations that are more and more difficult to meet. Overtime, teleconsultation services may evolve towards services aiming not only at curing the patient but also at providing him/her with appropriate information, directing him towards more suitable specialists or undertaking preventive actions.

**Telepatients contribute to supporting research through the regulated use of their medical data**

The transmission of patients’ medical data to the carers has become common thanks to the emergence of digital technologies such as teleconsultation or the use of chats that enable discussion with physicians. This is

the reason why competent authorities and healthcare professionals should implement a regulatory framework protecting personal data while raising patients' awareness on the value of their data. Through data sharing, the patients contribute to the improvement of the quality of care. Additionally, transmission of data to physicians contributes to research. This is the case of real-world data that is used in pharmaceutical research.