

# Patient Experience of Virtual Consultations During The COVID-19 Pandemic

V Murthy\*, C Herbert, D Bains, M Escudier, B Carey, M Ormond

Department of Oral Medicine,  
Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

\* The presenting author is a trainee/resident



## Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

### Introduction

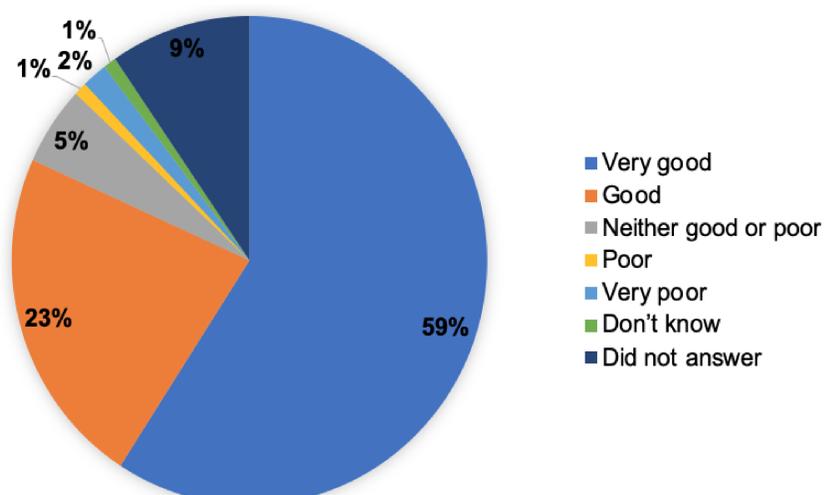
The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a rapid shift to the use of virtual consultations in both primary and secondary care. [1] The aim of this study was to assess patient experience of virtual consultations (telephone and video) in the Oral Medicine department during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Methods

A validated survey was developed by the Patient Experience Team in Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. A combination of previously validated questions and newly psychometric validated questions were used to design the patient feedback questionnaire. The survey consisted of 30 questions, answered anonymously and electronically by the participant. The survey was administered to all patients following their virtual (telephone or video) consultation. Data was synthesized and electronically analysed. Qualitative data was thematically analysed using the six-stage process proposed by Braun & Clark. [2]

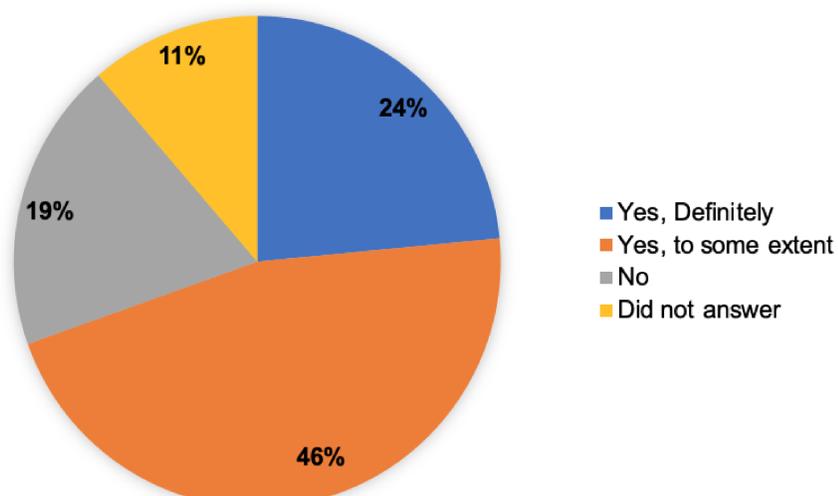
### Results

A total of 115 surveys were completed. Over 82% (Figure 1) rated their experience as good or very good and 69% (Figure 2) preferred a virtual consultation for their next consultation.



**Figure 1:** Question 19: Overall, how would you rate your experience of this appointment?

Over 82% found their experience as good or very good.



**Figure 2:** Question 20: Thinking about your appointment, would you prefer to use this again for your next appointment (for same/similar condition)?

70% preferred a virtual consultation for the next appointment.

Thematic analysis of individual comments identified positive themes including convenience and positive/helpful clinical experience. Areas for development identified from thematic analysis included accessibility and obvious clinical limitations in not undertaking a physical examination.

### Discussion

Virtual consultations provide an opportunity to safely assess patients, while meeting social distancing requirements and minimizing patient flow through hospitals. A number of studies completed in the dental setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, focus on patient satisfaction outcomes rather than experience, with the level of satisfaction generally reported to be high. [1,3] There is a relative paucity of validated questionnaires that can be used in telemedicine. Validated questionnaires exist, however, they are not exclusive to telemedicine and the validity of these questionnaires has not been tested in the telemedicine setting. [4, 5] To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study assessing patient experience of virtual consultations using a validated questionnaire tool in the dental setting.

From our analysis of responses, a number of service changes have been planned including, however, are not limited to; encouraging conversation regarding accessible and follow-up appointments, a review of the suitability of clinical problems to virtual clinics, communication skills training for virtual consultations, a review of the mechanisms by which patients are notified of appointments and to provide more information to patients regarding their appointment (for example, timing).

### Conclusion

There is a lack of universally accepted patient experience questionnaires for virtual consultations in dentistry. Current questionnaires focus on patient satisfaction. The overall patient experience assessed using this validated questionnaire, indicates a positive patient experience of virtual consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that virtual consultations will continue within the Trust long after the pandemic has ended.

### References

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