

Telehealth Interactions in General Practice: An Interdisciplinary Approach

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While telehealth is not a new phenomenon, the COVID-19 pandemic saw the rapid roll-out of technology-mediated consultations in many parts of the world. In Australia, telehealth general practice consultations rapidly became part of the new normal, particularly during periods of lockdown, and current indications are that they will remain an important part of the way that medical services are delivered in years to come. While guidelines on optimising the technological aspects of telehealth consultations are available to practising clinicians, the kinds of interactional adjustments necessary are not well understood. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both patients and clinicians find telehealth encounters 'different' from face-to-face consultations, but what are these differences, and precisely how can we ensure that the effectiveness of telehealth interactions is maximised?

In this presentation, I will describe an ongoing research project at Macquarie University* involving practising clinician-academics, a digital health researcher and applied linguists. I will focus on the way in which we are working in a collaborative and consilient way to understand the nature of telehealth general practice interactions from a range of stakeholder and theoretical perspectives. Drawing on interactional sociolinguistic approaches, I will illustrate some of the contributions that applied linguists can make to the analysis of these clinical encounters. I will also outline ways in which such insights can be made accessible to clinical practitioners who are able to apply them in their professional work.

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