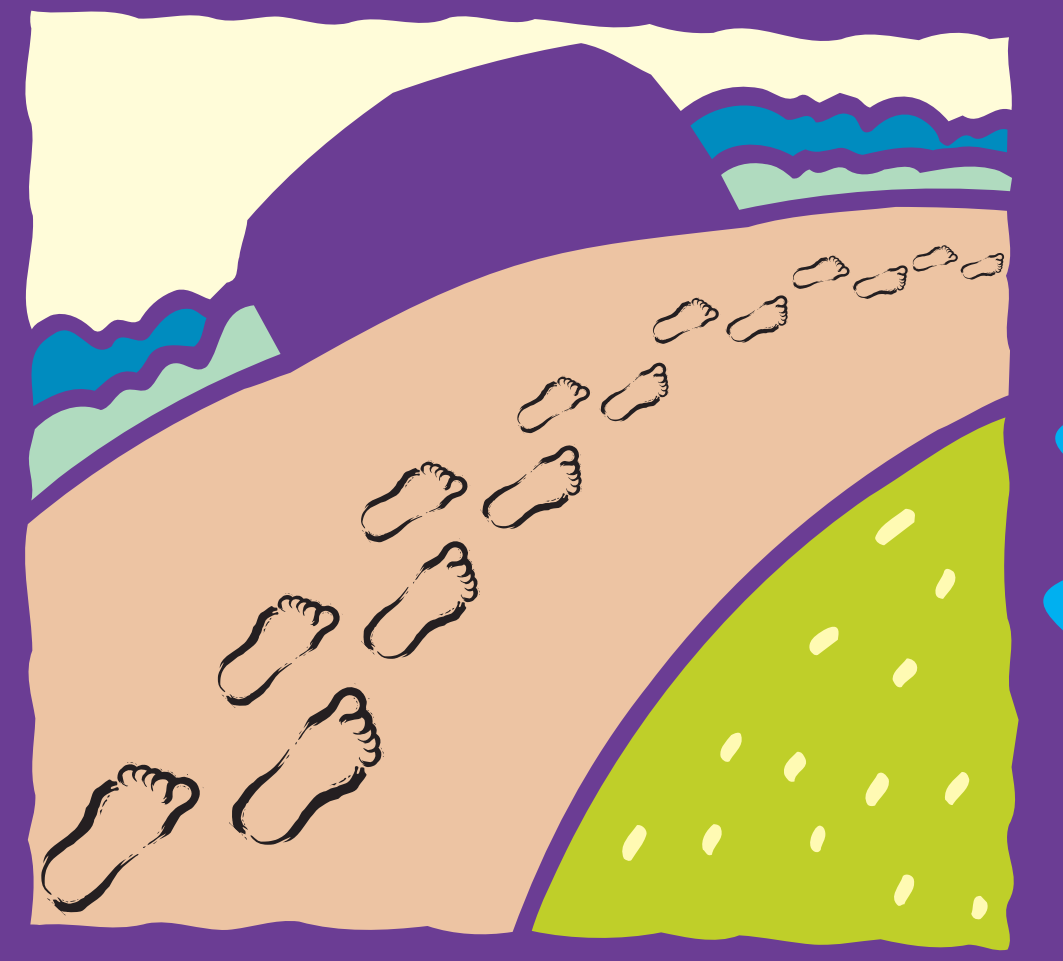


A Telemedicine Service For Diabetic Foot Disease

Is this the type of care patients in rural areas want?

BACKGROUND:

- Early diagnosis and the ability to determine the correct pathway of care is fundamental to managing diabetic foot disease and preventing diabetes-related lower limb amputations
- When local access to skilled multidisciplinary teams is not available, telemedicine networks can fill the gap in service availability and provide equity of access for people living in rural Australia



METHODOLOGY:

- Purposefully sampled qualitative research methodology
- Semi structured face to face interviews
- Subjects recruited from patients (and their carers) who received a telemedicine service 2005-2008

THE SERVICE:

- The Bega Valley (NSW) community health podiatrist provides a telemedicine service that accesses the specialist multi-disciplinary team at the Diabetes Centre, RPA Hospital Sydney
- Advice from the consultation is applied at local level by the podiatrist and other involved health service providers



KEY FINDINGS:

Open to the experience

Patients and carers were open to the experience of telemedicine. With the average age being 70, this suggests generational differences are not a hindrance.

"....I was happy to try anything to get some help..."
 "...I was very impressed with that"



Choice

Telemedicine can provide consumers with a choice about their health care and an opportunity to participate in decision making about their own care.

"I wanted someone who had a little bit more knowledge"
 "...living in a rural area you don't have much choice"



High stress levels

Comments reflected high levels of stress associated with travel to an urban centre for health care and suggest that the positive attitude towards telemedicine comes about as a desire to obviate trips to the city for medical care

"...much better if you can stay here"
 "...certain amount of emotional stress being in an urban area....so different, everything goes much faster..."



Use the service again

All service users reported a favourable experience with telemedicine and all indicated a willingness to use the service in the future if the need arose

"Yes sure, why not, it was really good, marvellous"



WHAT THE STUDY MEANS:

- The literature suggests 'readiness' is an indication of the degree to which a community is prepared to participate and succeed in telehealth
- This study suggests health consumers in the local community are ready, as indicated by their: positive responses when offered a service; high satisfaction levels with the service; willingness to use the service again

WHAT THE STUDY RECOMMENDS:

- The further development of a routine 'High Risk Foot' service in the Bega Valley that integrates the use of telemedicine
- This recommendation is supported by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) guidelines for Models of Care