

Telepsychiatry for Asian Americans

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Abstract : COVID-19 highlighted the active discrimination against the Asian American population easily seen through media, social tension, and increased crimes against the specific population. It is well known that long-term racism can also have a large impact on both emotional and psychological well-being. However, the healthcare disparity during this time also revealed how the Asian American community lacked the research data, political support, and medical infrastructure for this particular population. During a time when Asian American fear for safety with decreasing mental health, telepsychiatry is particularly promising. COVID-19 demonstrated how well psychiatry could integrate with telemedicine, with psychiatry being the second most utilized telemedicine visits. However, the Asian American community did not utilize the telepsychiatry resources as much as other groups. Because of this, we wanted to understand why the patient population who was affected the most by COVID-19 mentally did not seek out care. To do this, we decided to study the top telepsychiatry platforms. The current top telepsychiatry companies in the United States include Teladoc and BetterHelp. In the Teladoc mental health sector, they only had 4 available languages (English, Spanish, French, and Danish,) with none of them being an Asian language. In a similar manner, Teladoc's top competitor in the telepsychiatry space, BetterHelp, only listed a total of 3 Asian languages, including Mandarin, Japanese, and Malaysian. However, this is still a short list considering they have over 20 languages available. The shortage of available physicians that speak multiple languages is concerning, as it could be difficult for the Asian American community to relate with. There are limited mental health resources that cater to their likely cultural needs, further exacerbating the structural racism and institutional barriers to appropriate care. It is important to note that these companies do provide interpreters to comply with the nondiscrimination and language assistance federal law. However, interactions with an interpreter are not only more time-consuming but also less personal than talking directly with a physician. Psychiatry is the field that emphasizes interpersonal relationships. The trust between a physician and the patient is critical in developing patient rapport to guide in better understanding the clinical picture and treating the patient appropriately. The language barrier creates an additional barrier between the physician and patient. Because Asian Americans are one of the largest growing patient population bases, these telehealth companies have much to gain by catering to the Asian American market. Without providing adequate access to bilingual and bicultural physicians, the current system will only further exacerbate the growing disparity. The healthcare community and telehealth companies need to recognize that the Asian American population is a severely underserved population in mental health and has much to gain from telepsychiatry. The lack of language is one of many reasons why there is a disparity for Asian Americans in the mental health space.

Keywords : telemedicine, psychiatry, Asian American, disparity

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