

Figure 6.2. Types of Telehealth Services Used in Audiology Departments Within South African Public Sector Hospitals as Perceived by Audiologists, Indicated in Terms of % (n=28)

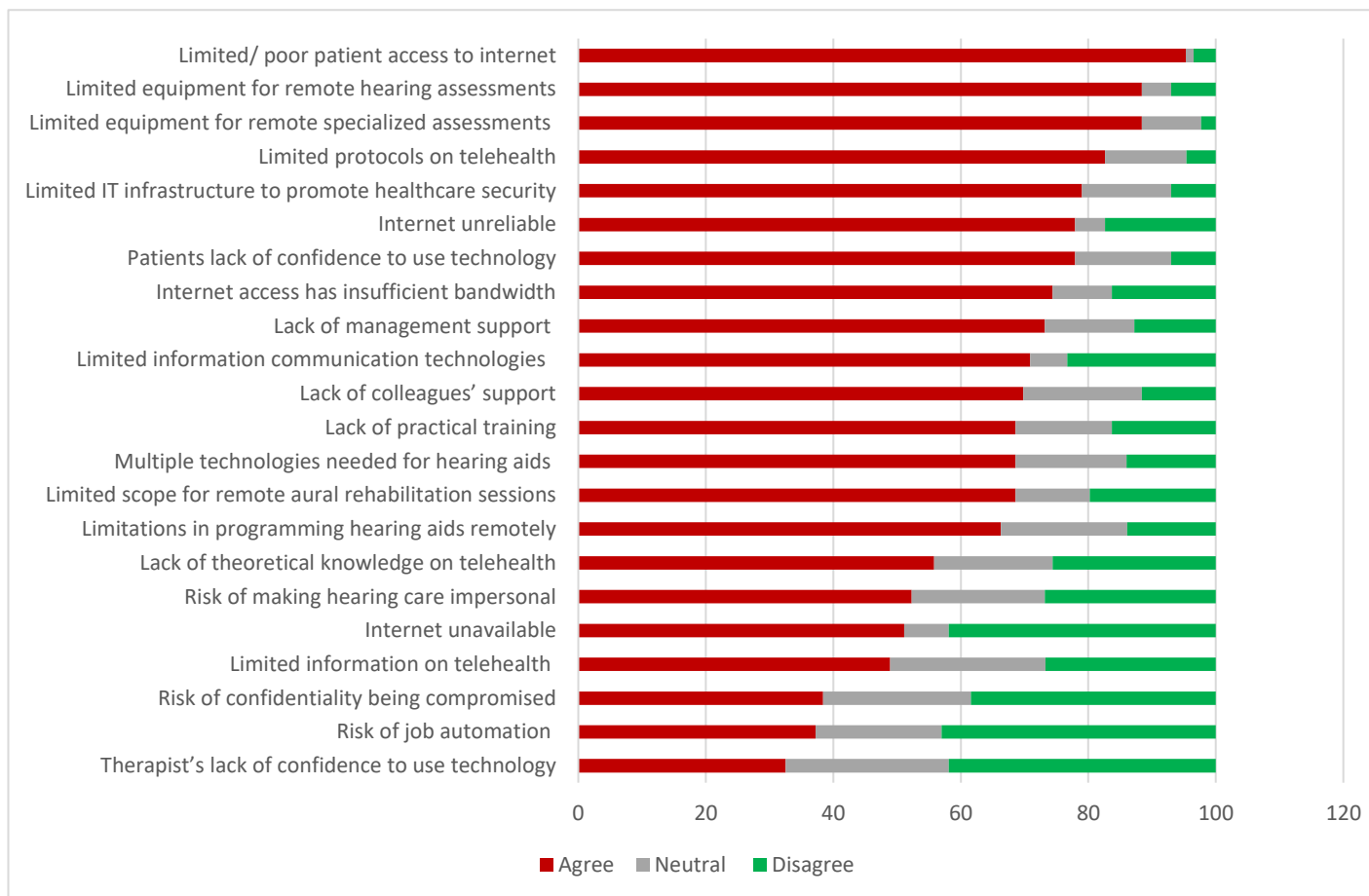


Figure 6.3. Perceived Barriers Toward Telehealth Service Delivery Within South African Public Sector Hospitals, Indicated in Terms of % (n=86)

Items are shown in order of most significant barrier and are slightly abbreviated from the phrases used in the survey; see Appendix K for the full text of survey questions and answers.

Table 6.2. Audiologists' Perceptions of Telehealth Practices Within Their Hospital Setting

(n=97)

Telehealth use by audiologists	% (n)
Unaware of what telehealth entails	8.2 (8)
Not willing to use telehealth	2.1 (2)
Willing, but no resources	74.2 (72)
Using telehealth, and it is effective	8.2 (8)
Other	7.2 (7)
Use of telehealth services pre-COVID-19 setting	% (n)
No	87.6 (85)
Yes	7.2 (7)
Unsure	5.2 (5)
Use of telehealth services currently (during COVID-19 setting)	% (n)
No	71.1 (69)
Yes	19.6 (19)
Unsure	9.3 (9)
Willingness to use telehealth services*	% (n)
No	6.4 (4)
Yes	84.1 (53)
Unsure	9.5 (6)

* n value is altered since this question was only applicable to the 69 audiologists who previously indicated that they did not use telehealth services (missing data for six audiologists)

Table 6.3. Themes, Categories, Descriptions, and Illustrative Examples of Focus Group Discussion on Perceptions of Telehealth Services for Hearing Loss in the Public Healthcare System

Themes and sub-themes	Description	Illustrative examples
1. Clinical practices		
Limitations of remote hearing healthcare	Not applicable to all populations; hearing loss and language barriers affect telehealth communication.	<p>‘Certain information is better understood by physical contact rather than electronic contact. Patients with multiple disabilities may struggle even further.’</p> <p>‘Hearing loss and language barriers through telephones and other technology can hamper ability to communicate.’</p>
	Impersonal nature; negative impact on patient relationship.	‘In a field like Audiology, where patients’ main difficulty is hearing, it may be difficult to impossible to get messages across to them effectively.’
	Quality of service and audiologists’ preferences for face-to-face consultations.	‘For me, even if the infrastructure is in place, I am not really in favour of telehealth. I prefer to render quality face to face interaction types of services and feel that this can’t be replaced by telehealth’
Limitations of South Africa’s public healthcare setting	Limitations and challenges in healthcare system question the feasibility and viability of telehealth within this setting.	‘Public health institutions, especially at primary healthcare level and those in rural areas are also too poorly equipped to be able to effectively provide these services. Telehealth in South Africa’s public health system thus faces large barriers to be successfully implemented at this time.’
Policy and protocol	Lack of policies, protocols, and guidelines to guide the use of telehealth.	‘My concern is with the record-keeping. When patients come in for an appointment, I know the procedure. With telehealth, there are no clear guidelines. Also, there are no protocols to distinguish when to use what form of telehealth and no guidelines.’
Knowledge and training	Increased telehealth training needed for audiologists; knowledge and training to hospital management and policymakers; promotion and awareness of telehealth services.	<p>‘The telehealth system is grossly underdeveloped and requires additional training by all healthcare workers.’</p> <p>‘If leaders and those in power can be educated about telehealth, it can be easier to have access to equipment necessary for telehealth.’</p>
		‘There is a lack of public awareness and understanding of the potential benefits of telehealth.’

2. Hearing healthcare resources		
Information systems and technology	Lack of IT and software support required, including limited or no access to the internet at hospitals.	‘Telehealth services are a great challenge in low resourced hospitals or rural communities. Thus, access to reliable internet and coverage remains the greatest barrier to achieving telehealth services.’
Equipment and infrastructure	Lack of equipment and infrastructural resources.	‘Unfortunately, the public health system hasn’t really invested in procurement of equipment which is telehealth compatible.’
Human resources	Shortage of audiology staff in many of the South African public sector hospitals.	‘In government, we know that the organogram is constantly changing, posts are frozen if therapists leave, and new therapists are seldom hired, so the staffing, in addition to the hospital’s infrastructure, is a big challenge to telehealth.’
3. Patient restrictions impacting hearing healthcare		
Financial resources	Many patients are unable to afford the resources required to access telehealth services.	‘South Africa’s public healthcare system is largely used by people from poor socio-economic backgrounds, and thus unable to access the technology required to receive telehealth services.’
Education	High percentage of uneducated and/ or illiterate patients receive public healthcare sector services.	‘A majority of our patients are not educated, thus making the use of teleaudiology almost impossible.’ ‘Most patients are from very poor backgrounds and are illiterate.’
Employment	Employment status impacts patients’ ability to access telehealth services.	‘Most patients served in public are unemployed.’
4. Perceived benefits of telehealth		
Accessibility to services	Increased accessibility of cost-efficient and time-efficient audiology services to a broader population - elimination of transport and travelling costs; and the convenience of telehealth for patients and audiologists.	‘I believe telehealth has the potential to bridge the access gap for patients, particularly those living in rural areas who have limited access to hearing health professionals.’ ‘For me, the biggest advantage is the convenience. The convenience for ourselves as well as our patients. It means that reduces their travel time and a whole lot of anxiety.’
COVID-19 pandemic	Current covid-19 pandemic highlights the usefulness and value of telehealth services as a means of infection control and minimizing the risk of contact.	‘Telehealth services is a viable solution considering the pandemic.’ ‘It would assist a lot, especially during this pandemic (to reduce infection).’
Potential and willingness to use	Recognition of potential use of telehealth and willingness to use it; and the need to adapt and modify telehealth practices according to available resources.	‘Telehealth requires adaption. Many might display hesitation, but we need to keep up and ‘go with the flow’ in an ethical way using evidence-based practices for telehealth.’

'I believe that telehealth has the ability to work well in the public sector.'
