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Legal Protections for Patients with Medical Conditions in Online Health Consultations

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Abstract: Legal protections in telemedicine protect patients' rights, privacy, and care quality, but research often overlooks patients' perspectives. Therefore, understanding evolving legislation and patient-centered legal concepts improves patient care. This article aims to explore legal protections for patients with medical conditions in online health consultations. This study used a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine articles related to legal protections for patients, medical conditions, and online health consultations. We searched the Scopus and PubMed databases for articles in three categories: legal protections for patients, medical conditions, and online health consultations over the last five years (2019-2024). Using the Publish and Perish and Mendeley Reference Manager applications, we selected 389 papers from the Scopus database and 46 from the PubMed database based on specific criteria. Therefore, we conducted a PRISMA analysis on the 59 full-text research articles that we included. The results show that legal protections for patients in online health consultations include confidentiality, informed consent, licensure, data protection, emergency response protocols, professional standards, telemedicine compliance, care quality, and redress mechanisms. Solutions include streamlining licensing processes and enhancing cross-border regulations. The study emphasizes the need for patient advocacy, legal protection, data protection, and ethical compliance in online medical consultations, addressing barriers like dissatisfaction and lack of funds.

Keyword: Legal Protection, Medical Conditions, Cyber Security, Online Health Consultations.

INTRODUCTION

Telemedicine is a health practice using audio, visual, and data communication, including care, diagnosis, consultation, and treatment as well as the exchange of medical data and scientific discussions at a distance. Based on the above understanding, it can be understood that the scope of telemedicine is quite broad, including the provision of remote health services (including clinical, educational and administrative services), through the transfer of information (audio, video, graphics), using telecommunication devices (two-way interactive audio-video, computers, and telemetry) involving doctors, patients and other parties. In simple terms, telemedicine has actually been applied when there is a discussion between two doctors discussing patient problems over the telephone (Jamil, Khairan, & Fuad, 2015). In telemedicine practice, it is important to provide legal protection against disease to patients because it helps protect patient rights, privacy, and standards of care offered through virtual services. Therefore, this article seeks to assess the regulatory framework, policies, and legal enforcement mechanisms for patient protection in virtual consultations, with an emphasis on patient rights, confidentiality, informed consent, and conflict resolution in health care through information technology. The popularity of telemedicine tools and platforms for consultations over the phone or via the Internet has raised new and interesting issues in terms of anti-discrimination (Centre for Health Equity Law and Policy (C-HELP), 2023), privacy, data protection (Pramanik et al., 2019), and the ethics of patient-physician relationships in cyberspace (Marandi & Memarian, 2024). Knowledge and analysis of the existing legal provisions which patients with chronic diseases are entitled to in these situations, is vital towards improving patient care, and confidence in health providers and online sites promoting their services (M. A. Hall et al., 2024).

In some cases, a research by Freckelton (2020) fails to consider the patients' perspectives on the legal protections available during online doctor's appointments, which could aid in the development of patient-centered legal concepts (Kelley et al., 2022). In addition, some research have not accounted for the rapid rise in the use of telemedicine technological advances (S. Ye et al., 2021), as well as the legal protections that come with them (Nittari et al., 2020). Therefore, patients need to reframe their understanding of these new technologies, virtual care, data security, and legal compliance to guide the progression of these telehealth implementations. Research results solely concentrate on the specific tools developed to tackle the legal issue of Internet-based health consultation during that period (Ignatowicz et al., 2019) because people often overlook history, assuming that certain advancements have gone unnoticed, potentially undermining the vital reality of the constantly evolving legislation and its applications in patient care.

The regulation of patients' medical information in online consultations is crucial, as laws like HIPAA (Moore, 2019) and GDPR (Mourby et al., 2021) protect the privacy and security of patient health records. Therefore, informed consent is essential for healthcare practitioners to inform patients about virtual visits, potential risks, and data processing methods. Meanwhile, telemedicine laws in various countries ensure compliance with legal frameworks and maintain patient safety (Gupta et al., 2020). Thus, patients can use third-party dispute mechanisms to express disapproval of standard online physician fees in cases of unsatisfactory consultations, ethical infringement, or violations of laws.

Cross-border health consultations are subject to legal restrictions due to factors such as licensing (Kaplan, 2020), jurisdiction regulations (Nittari et al., 2020), data transfer regulations (Küzeci & Yeşiltuna, 2022), and the regulations of both the patient's and providers' countries (Freckelton, 2020). Emerging legal issues, such as data privacy (Waibel et al., 2023), patient consent (Yao & Yang, 2023), and compliance with new legal requirements in the telehealth industry (Köhler et al., 2024), surround emerging technologies like AI-supported medical aids and remote patient monitoring tools. It means that patients have the right to understand legal protection, privacy protection, and complaint procedures available during an online health consultation.

However, a research overlook the effectiveness of legal enforcement tools in online health consultations (Čartolovni et al., 2022). Other potentially leads to a disconnect between law and patient complaints or compliance matters (Li & van Rooij, 2022). In addition, Hall et al. (2024) overlook legal complications, particularly jurisdictional borders, which could result in neglecting regulatory aspects for online health consultations. For those reasons from previous studies, this article goes beyond just checking boxes and seeks to enhance the legal protection of healthcare providers and platforms by adding more ethics into the law regarding protection. The research delves into the legal issues surrounding the compliance of surveys with various online health consultation services, and investigates whether these regulations provide sufficient protection for the patient in question. Motivated by the growing importance of legal attention to patient rights and privacy in the provision of online healthcare services, the present research seeks to fill the gaps that still exist as well as establish factors that would enhance legal protection for patients and ultimately improve doctor-patient relations. Finally, studies that focus on the construction of legal support for patients during their online health consultations are well equipped to change the rules, enhance patient safety, help patients and health care professionals, harness ethical behavior, facilitate creativity, and resolve obstacles that prevent the development of high-quality and secure virtual health care services.

METHOD

In order to accomplish the aim of this study, a systematic literature review (SLR) approach was implemented to examine published articles that were pertinent to the research subject. The primary objective was to ensure that patients with medical conditions were legally protected during online health consultations. Furthermore, the Scopus and Pubmed databases, which are widely recognized as reference services, were employed to conduct a search for scientific articles in three distinct categories: legal protections for patients, legal protections for medical conditions, and legal protections for online health consultations. Consequently, a methodical approach was implemented to identify articles that addressed those three categories. This was achieved by employing the Mendeley Reference Manager and Publish and Perish 8 as instruments for the analysis. Additionally, the investigation took into account certain criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of pertinent ideas. Lastly, the PRISMA analysis was conducted on the full-text research articles that were retrieved from the Scopus and Pubmed databases, which included identification, screening, and acceptance.

In the process of the methodical approach by using Publish and Perish 8 with three categories: legal protections for patients, legal protections for medical conditions, and legal protections for online health consultations. Table 1 presents the results of three categories by Publish and Perish 8.

Table 1. The results of Three Categories by Publish and Perish 8

No	Category	Number	
		Scopus	PubMed
1.	Legal protections for patients	200	11
2.	Legal protections for medical conditions	179	15
3.	Legal protections for online health consultations	30	20
Total		389	46

The methodical approach by using Publish and Perish 8 on the Scopus and the PubMed databases between 2019 and 2024 resulted 435 papers formatted in research articles, book chapters, book reviews, reviews, proceeding articles, books, editorial papers, disserations, and theses. Furthermore, they were were gathered in the Mendeley Reference Manager folder, exported as "RIS" data. This way aimed to investigate the gathered papers which matched with criteria of relevant ideas for inclusion and exclusion criteria before undergoing to PRISMA analysis.

To select the literature, the systematic literature review (SLR) approach utilized five primary stages: 1) The selected publication data comprises full-text research articles, with the exception of papers formatted in research articles, book chapters, book reviews, reviews, proceeding articles, books, editorial papers, dissertations, and theses. 2) We restricted the selection of full-text articles to those published within the past five years (2019-2024), encompassing three previously selected categories: legal protections for patients, legal protections for medical conditions, and legal protections for online health consultations. We conducted the investigation exclusively using globally sourced data, specifically the Scopus and PubMed databases, which are reputable journals with a strong reputation. 4) To gather papers that matched the categories and facilitate the precise search for full-text research articles after excluding certain document formats, we used Publish or Perish 8 and Mendeley reference management. 5) We chose to search for full-text research articles in the Scopus and PubMed databases to obtain comprehensive global data on the previously determined categories.

We previously determined three categories into which to divide the process of searching for scientific publications. It included legal protections for patients, legal protections for medical conditions, and legal protections for online health consultations. Figure 1 presents the distributed data related to the inclusion and exclusion of literature selection in the PRISMA analysis.

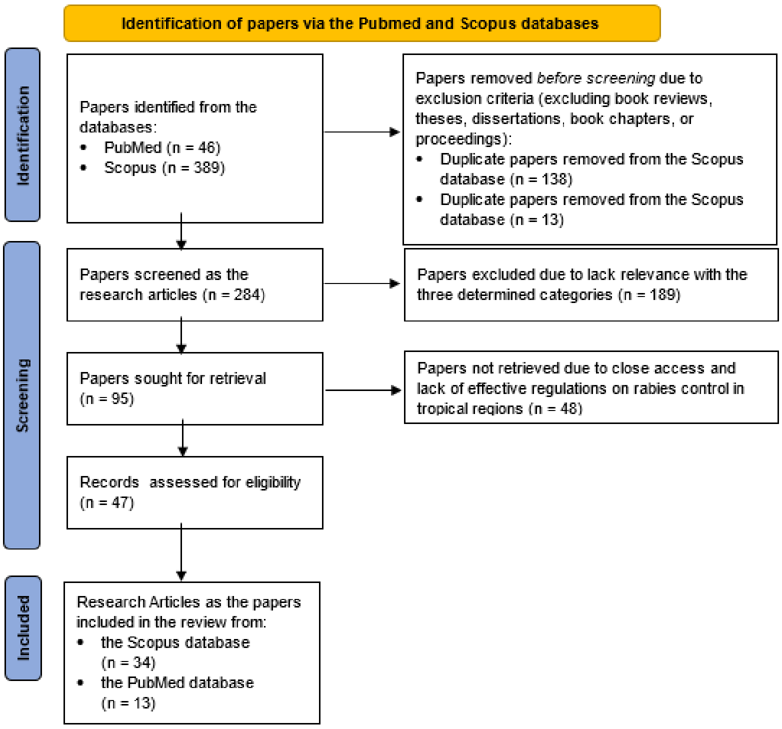

Figure 1. Article selection process based on the PRISMA systematic review flowchart

A comprehensive worldwide database, including Scopus and PubMed, was searched for publications published between 2019 and 2024. The search yielded 46 papers from the PubMed database and 489 from the Scopus database. However, 13 papers from the PubMed database and 138 from the Scopus database were removed due to exclusion criteria. After screening, 284 papers were left, with 189 articles excluded due to lack of relevance. 48 research articles were not retrieved due to close access and lack of legal protections for patients, legal protections for medical conditions, and legal protections for online health consultations. The researchers acquired 34 research articles with complete text of significant value from the

Scopus database and 13 from the PubMed database. The RIS format was converted from Mendeley Reference Manager.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confidentiality

The SLR approach addresses the privacy and protection of patients' health information during online consultations. The integration of health services through virtual consultations raises questions about patient health information privacy and security. Virtual consultations cannot always provide the same level of security as conventional consultations, creating vulnerability of sensitive information (Keshta & Odeh, 2021). Enforcement and compliance with this law may be easier in the context of the internet, where geographical boundaries do not prevail (De Witte et al., 2021). Hackers and data leakages are real occurrences in online platforms, raising concerns of infiltration of the pluralistic system for sharing information (Suwadi et al., 2024). Law enforcement agencies may not catch up with the rapid development of the online healthcare system, resulting in a dangerous gap in enforcement (Lustgarten et al., 2020). Each illness has its own legal expectations, and online interactions with patients should be underpinned by measures to protect patient information and relevant laws on sensitive healthcare data (Iyengar et al., 2020).

Studies show that there are potential risks such as data breaches or cyber threats that can lead to the unauthorized revelation of health information that is shared over the Internet (Iyengar et al., 2020; Lustgarten et al., 2020; Suwadi et al., 2024). There is a general consensus that there are issues maintaining trust of patients while engaging in online healthcare services. Research has also pointed out that there is a positive relationship between confidentiality promises and the likelihood of taking virtual consultations (De Witte et al., 2021). Providers of health services are expected to abide by the existing laws and regulations on data protection in an effort to enhance confidentiality and security of patients' information in an online environment (Keshta & Odeh, 2021). Further, moral principles are critical in specifying the limits of data safeguarding and patient interpersonal engagement, within the scope of cyberspace (Lustgarten et al., 2020).

Informed Consent

The informed consent processes that are often recommended for use during the online consultations pose challenges to patients with low digital literacy and those who need immediate healthcare, which may result in delays or blockages in access to care (Spanos et al., 2021). Achieving consistency of the elements related to informed consent across the various services provided through the internet tends to be inordinately difficult, thus variability in the dimensions of the available health information is frequently encountered (Iyengar et al., 2020). The patients might not always appreciate all the risks, scope, expected benefits, and the limitations of treatment consultations that may include a virtual interaction, for instance, when presented with very complicated information, and well explained (Lustgarten et al., 2020). In case of a crisis or other emergent settings, attempts to obtain elaborate informed consent prior to trying to provide an online consultation may not be realistic or reasonable, which may lead to delays in care provision (Suwadi et al., 2024).

Thorough consent may lead to an expectation of getting annoyed if this is the approach that one has to be used for every online video consultation, hence apathy to the said processes. Informed consent is a core component of health care practice and even more when it is concerning online patient interaction. However, some factors such as accessibility, standardization, and comprehension, practicality in emergencies and consent fatigue still need addressing in calculated measures to achieve a fair level of adherence to patient safety and ease integration of virtual health services (De Witte et al., 2021). The regulations highlight that there is not only a legal but also, that there is also an ethical duty of care regarding the informed consent process in the provision of health care services delivered over the internet (Keshta & Odeh, 2021). As supported by De Witte et al. (2021), informed consent allows patients to make choices about their treatment, making them feel less dependent on others and more in control of their own health care decisions. Suggested measures include the use of standardised consent forms, clear communication strategies, as well as easy-to-understand instructional materials (Suwadi et al., 2024). Informed consent is foundational to ethical practice in healthcare, especially as regards online consultation during which there is transparency, individual autonomy and individual risk exposure (Lustgarten et al., 2020).

Licensure and Credentialing

Licensing in many jurisdictions poses a great challenge to health care providers, where time and resources are taken up tremendously. Rigid licensing rules can deter patients from benefiting from the services of skilled providers who are based out of their area, primarily in resource-limited geographical locations (Pandya et al., 2022). It presents logistical issues for healthcare providers who have to grapple with different regulatory schemes from different jurisdictions, and may result in variation in the quality of services offered and adherence to set regulations. Creative and artistic aspects of telemedicine as well as advancements in healthcare technology could be curbed by stringent licensing measures while many individuals are denied the benefits of quality healthcare by practitioners with immense reputation but no licensing (Chuchvara et al., 2020). The need to protect the public in terms of maintaining the safety of patients and quality of care offered while tackling the practical issues of jurisdictional licensing is key for regulation of the great potential of online health services (Kaplan, 2022).

Through borrowing licensure and credentialing processes from various healthcare violet geographic borders for patients’ suchen needed procedures, policies intending to meet and avoid the mentioned issues in point have been implemented. Some of the issues emphasized include the need for healthcare workers or providers able to provide services via the internet to comply with licensing requirements for each locality to whom clients are being offered such telehealth consultations ethically and legally (Hassanaly & Dufour, 2021; Kaplan, 2022; Tedeschi, 2021). Proposed solutions include streamlining licensing processes, promoting reciprocity agreements, and enhancing cross-border telemedicine regulations. Every healthcare provider must obtain the necessary licenses in the jurisdictions of the patients to ensure compliance with regulations and to provide necessary quality standards in patient-centered online healthcare consultations (Chuchvara et al., 2020). And this review highlights professional regulation as a common discipline aiding in patient safety trust and ethical practice within a fast growing virtual healthcare services provision.

Security and Data Protection

Over the years, virtual healthcare consultation services have come to employ and integrate the data protection conventions so that they do not compromise patient confidentiality (Courbier et al., 2019). However, the structural/organizational and behavioral enforcement mechanisms may be weak and, therefore, compliance levels may be low (Galvin Paul R., 2020). These standards are vulnerable to cyber threats, and hacking techniques can still obtain patient information. Some of them pay less attention to privacy policies and simply focus on making money from the data. It brings up the issue of patient data entertainment and data commercialization exploitation.

The patients and healthcare workers are not aware of all of the necessary data security measures leading to the accidental sharing of private information. It is these international standards that pose challenges when dealing or complying with such laws since the laws differ from one country to another (Zenker et al., 2022). Some solutions to improve the protection of patient information in online health consultations are paying more attention to enforcement issues, data usage and monetization concerns, technology deficiencies, users and legal aspects (Courbier et al., 2019; Galvin Paul R., 2020; Zenker et al., 2022). Therefore, efforts to facilitate user-centered design for online health care must thus integrate and balance user privacy and autonomy with the ethical pursuit of data driven healthcare.

Emergency Response Protocols

Emergency response in the online consultation continues to have vague and frequent unclear protocols which create confusion in urgent medical situations (Gostin et al., 2020; Gostin & Hodge Jr, 2020). This also causes further improperly ordered emergency care due to delays in receiving care instructions (Hick et al., 2020; J. Ye, 2020). There are also other limitations of these platforms and virtual treatment which do not allow patients to receive emergency care and all the patients are required to get supportive help themselves (Gostin et al., 2020; Hick et al., 2020; J. Ye, 2020). The interrelations among legal issues and the clarification of how health providers and platforms can respond to emergency situations become complicated (Gostin & Hodge Jr, 2020). Patients do not feel appreciated for the gravity of the emergency situations and the ways in which appropriate care can be taken (Hick et al., 2020).

Elements of effective communication, time and level of responsiveness, virtual provided care, legal aspects, patients understanding/information comprehension should be used in making emergency calls more effective in online physician-patient communication (Gostin & Hodge Jr, 2020). The incorporation of online consultations in healthcare delivery also calls for concern over the safety of patients especially in cases of an emergency (Gostin et al., 2020). It is necessary to give the information on the patient’s response strategy to virtual care to enhance chances of rapid intervention during or after the virtual care. Effective communication, timely intervention, provider responsibilities, technological means, and patient empowerment play an important role in achieving the goal of security and the responsiveness to emergency situations in the virtual healthcare environment.

Professional Standards

One common drawback of online strategies is that patients are often unable to undergo a complete physical examination or assessment due to the virtual nature of the interaction, which can lower the quality of care and diagnosis received in comparison to face-to-face consultations (Haleem et al., 2021). In addition, it is possible that the absence of such qualities as warmth and ability to create rapport will negatively influence the relationship between patients and providers or the overall care of the patients (Gilbert et al., 2021). Poor internet connections, computer malfunctions, and insufficient experience using the internet for care delivery can have a significant impact on patient understanding, responsiveness, and the overall professionalism of the consultation (Scheibner et al., 2020).

Healthcare providers may encounter certain limitations when providing online services within their scope of practice, potentially leading to a decrease in the quality of care provided in the virtual environment (Hardcastle & Ogbogu, 2020). Maintaining differences in laws, various activities towards licensure, and moral norms in practice can hinder the maintenance of professional ethics and conduct in online consultations, potentially leading to uneven care levels among patients (Omboni et al., 2022). In the current scenario, with the increasing prevalence of online healthcare services, it is crucial to uphold professional standards of service delivery to ensure patient satisfaction, much like in face-to-face consultations (Yang et al., 2019). This literature review considers professional deficiencies related to online health care interactions, such as ethical, care, communication, training, education, and legal issues.

Compliance with Telemedicine Laws

The laws and regulations regarding telemedicine tend to be dependent on the state or country, which complicates and confuses the patients who wish to engage in telemedicine and its practice. On the one hand, patients want to adhere to the regulations laid out by the telehealth provider irrespective of where they are, yet on another hand, this has some limitations (Howgego et al., 2020). The telemedicine law is a more dynamic thing than many others and therefore you may create some loopholes in the conformity of some laws (Ferorelli et al., 2020). Due to jurisdictional discrepancies, implementing telemedicine legislation is often difficult which then raises concerns over compliance issues with telemedicine and the legal aspects of online medical treatment (Sklar & Robertson, 2020). Overcompliance with telemedicine laws may also inhibit the transformation of healthcare through telemedicine technologies or other strategies and technologies needed for the evolution of care delivery to patients without fully meeting the existing regulations.

Throughout the sector of online health consultations, there have occurred great improvements (Mazzuca et al., 2022), which also calls for the same strategies regarding the regulations on telemedicine (Fields, 2020), to prevent incidences of noncompliance and risk of care without standards (Arimany-Manso et al., 2020). Most of the published works concur that online healthcare services should be regulated such that it is in compliance with the telemedicine laws where the patient resides (Ferorelli et al., 2020; Fields, 2020; Gómez Arias et al., 2021; Howgego et al., 2020; Sklar & Robertson, 2020). Basic and clinical ethics can be precursors that would put providers in compliance with telemedicine laws.

Care Quality

Telemedicine laws and regulations are not uniformly applicable across the world, which raises a number of compliance issues and sometimes causes patients to have difficulty receiving care in different countries. In specific cases, such as when healthcare providers lack registration in the patient's jurisdiction, a narrow focus on local regulations may negatively affect patients' access to healthcare services (Elliott & Yopes, 2019; Wang et al., 2023). The constantly evolving and 'catching up' nature of telemedicine regulations in the country can pose legal risks, as health care providers may either violate or fail to comply with necessary health laws (Dash et al., 2021). Telemedicine law proliferation attempts across jurisdictions are difficult, leading to possible differences in the implementation and legal requirements in telemedicine encounters.

The increasing popularity of online medical consultations necessitates a careful consideration of patient welfare in relation to telemedicine laws, ensuring the lawful delivery of patient care. This systematic literature review explores the emotions of the population in relation to online health services and the telemedicine laws that have been established in various states where patients reside (Dash et al., 2021; Elliott & Yopes, 2019; Nittari et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). It stresses that because there are such laws in telemedicine, patients should obtain compliant care even when using online health consultations. The quality of care patients receive during virtual encounters directly influences the effectiveness of a virtual healthcare engagement. Accurate diagnoses, relevant treatment plans, and appropriate follow-up represent the core of quality virtual healthcare services (Elliott & Yopes, 2019). Therefore, smart approaches, including remote monitoring systems, telehealth technologies, and artificial intelligence, are supplemental tools for implementing precise diagnosis, adapting individual treatment plans, and enhancing post-treatment management.

Redress Mechanisms

There may not be sufficient means to address patients's grievances, and this creates problems in getting remedies even for poor quality of care or ethical breaches. Making the process of resolving such an issue too open may deter patients from using web-based healthcare services, enhancing or detracting their satisfaction and confidence towards such services (Solaiman, 2023). Patients may choose not to file such complaints because they are concerned about the safety of their identities or private data (McGranahan et al., 2021). Insufficient resources may prevent providers and/or platforms from effectively addressing these issues, leading to their delay or inadequate resolution (Hartlev, 2021). Legal settings with regard to using online health consultations serve as one of the hurdles facing the resolution of disputes arising from such services (Putturaj et al., 2021). In the context of online healthcare interactions, we must consider various obstacles to enhance the effectiveness of grievance resolution procedures. These obstacles include limited redress options, transparency concerns, information risks, resource scarcity, and the legal framework (Wolf et al., 2019). Patients' ability to interact with healthcare providers and access mechanisms that resolve their complaints is at the heart of online healthcare service provision.

The study highlights the critical importance of patient advocacy during online medical consultations, underscoring the need for functional grievance redress mechanisms to address issues and improve accountability, particularly with regard to patients' rights in ovarian care delivery. Law, data protection, and ethical compliance are very vital in patient complaint and dispute resolution (Stephenson et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2020). The outcomes of grievance resolution activities provide mechanisms that allow home health care services to optimize the quality of care offered to patients and the services as a whole, return greatly improved patients’ experiences, improve patient outcomes, and create an environment of continuous improvement.

From this systematic literature review (SLR) research, the scholarly work on law and policy in relation to online health consultations fails to appreciate the challenges arising from the need to deal with a set of laws from different countries. As a result, there is the risk of failure to comply with various legal requirements that govern virtual healthcare communications. The results of the analysis prioritize legal requirements during patient treatment or care, potentially neglecting the patient's optimal protection from legal sources when receiving services in a virtual environment. The mass media sometimes overstate the expansion of telemedicine activities. Therefore, legal protection within online health consultations can effectively address these barriers, rather than obstructing compliance, patient-oriented approaches, technologies, patients, and enforcement in healthcare services.

Legal assurances are important for protecting patients' rights and, most importantly, for protecting the trust and privacy of patient records exchanged via online consultation. In the health sector, laws establish norms for information and patient confidentiality, which ensure the protection of individuals' health information (Gupta et al., 2020; Kelley et al., 2022; Mourby et al., 2021; Nittari et al., 2020; S. Ye et al., 2021). This article looks into how the laws create an elaborate framework that compels medical personnel to seek informed consent from patients before conducting online consultations, for example by informing patients about the measures in place to protect their data, the dangers involved, and limitations on the use of health information. Based on the research results, an analysis of the telemedicine laws that govern online health consultations reveals the responsibilities and obligations imposed on health professionals and health care platforms to ensure safe remote delivery of services. Grasping the legal repercussions of committing mistakes, a diagnostic error, or any unintentional negative developments following virtual care is equally important for both patients and healthcare providers (Lindstad & Ludvigsen, 2023).

Based on the results of the research analysis, effective patient information security measures proposed include the use and development of standard-compliant patient consent forms, appropriate communication measures, and communication materials that are simple to comprehend and assimilate. Maintaining patient trust necessitates adhering to professional ethics, and even when a patient receives treatment via telemedicine, varying state laws complicate patient engagement and pose legal risks (Freckelton, 2020; M. A. Hall et al., 2024). Smart technologies like home monitoring systems and relevant artificial intelligence can enhance the effectiveness of virtual healthcare, which includes telemedicine. It is important to have mechanisms to remedy outpatient complaints; however, barriers such as dissatisfaction with the available options, lack of clarity, lack of adequate information, and lack of funds may complicate redress. Therefore, this study utilizes a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to assist in formulating policies, formulating suitable responses, and making informed decisions. Furthermore, this study has summarized the review, indicating that the legal protections for patients with medical conditions in online health consultations encompass confidentiality, informed consent, licensure and credentialing, security and data protection, emergency response protocols, professional standards, compliance with telemedicine laws, care quality, and redress mechanisms. Figure 2 presents the legal protections for patients with medical conditions in online health consultations.

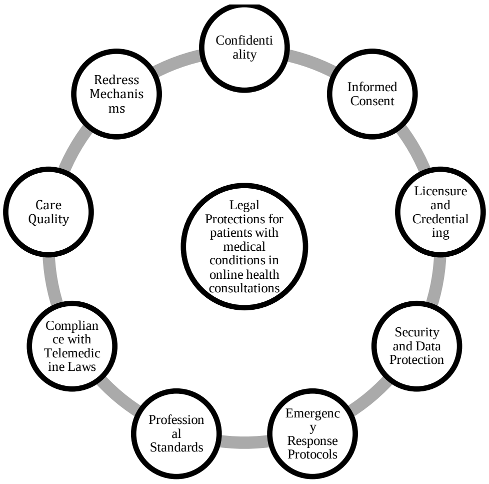

Figure 2. The legal protections for patients with medical conditions in online health consultations.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the regulatory frameworks, policies, and enforcement mechanisms for patient protection in virtual consultations, focusing on rights, confidentiality, informed consent, and conflict resolution. It highlights the challenges faced by patients with low digital literacy and those needing immediate healthcare due to the lack of understanding of the risks and limitations of virtual interactions. The study used a systematic literature review to guide policy formulation and decision-making. It results legal protections for patients with medical conditions in online health consultations, including confidentiality, informed consent, licensure, data protection, emergency response protocols, professional standards, telemedicine compliance, care quality, and redress mechanisms. Solutions include streamlining licensing processes, promoting reciprocity agreements, and enhancing cross-border telemedicine regulations. Smart approaches like remote monitoring systems, telehealth technologies, and artificial intelligence can help implement accurate diagnoses, adapt treatment plans, and enhance post-treatment management.

The study highlights the importance of patient advocacy in online medical consultations and the need for functional grievance redress mechanisms. It emphasizes the need for legal protection, data protection, and ethical compliance in online health consultations. Legal assurances are crucial for protecting patients' rights and trust, and telemedicine laws govern online health consultations. Effective patient information security measures include standard-compliant consent forms, appropriate communication measures, and simple communication materials. Smart technologies like home monitoring systems and artificial intelligence can enhance the effectiveness of virtual healthcare. Barriers such as dissatisfaction with available options, lack of clarity, inadequate information, and lack of funds may complicate redress mechanisms.

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