

# VIRTUAL REALITY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON TELEMEDICINE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

The world has very few devices left to fight [COVID-19](#) with, but technology remains one of them. Whether it is the employ of state-of-the-art technology in the discovery of cures or vaccines, or traditional technology services to enhance health care and consultations, or even tools that keep people at home occupied/productive, it is clear that technology will serve humanity at one of its darkest moments. The pandemic has contributed, in no small measure, to the understanding of the myriad ways in which available technologies have not been put to better use, and presented people with multiple opportunities to harness these devices, techniques and methods to get on with life in the time of lockdown. Among the primary [uses is telemedicine](#), rendered inexorable now, by the temporary paralysis brought on by a freeze on movement.

The Centre's recent guidelines allowing for widespread use of telemedicine services came as a shot in the arm for telehealth crusaders in the country, among them the Telemedicine Society of India that has long been battling to use the technology in its complete arc to reach remote areas in India. This move finds consonance with the rest of the world where several nations, also deeply impacted by the pandemic, have deployed telemedicine to reach people who have been unable to come to hospital, to reduce footfalls in hospitals, and to even provide medical and mental health counselling to countless people. It was way back in 2000 that telemedicine was first employed in India, but the progress has been excruciatingly slow, until the pandemic. However, it does seem as if the medical community was only held back by the lack of legislation to enable tele consultations. For no sooner was the policy announced, than hospitals and clinicians hurried to jump onto the bandwagon, advertising contact information for patients. The advantages are peculiar in the current context, when putting distance between people is paramount, as tele consultations are not barred even when health care professionals and patients may have to be quarantined. The advancement of telecommunication capabilities over the years has made the transmission of images and sound files (heart and lung sounds, coughs) faster and simpler. Pilot telemedicine experiments in ophthalmology and psychiatry have proven to be of immense benefit to the communities. Telemedicine's time is here, finally. While unleashing the full potential of telemedicine to help people, experts and government agencies must be mindful of the possible inadequacies of the medium, and securing sensitive medical information; such cognisance should guide the use of the technology.

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