

Telemedicine use during the pandemic and the digital divide

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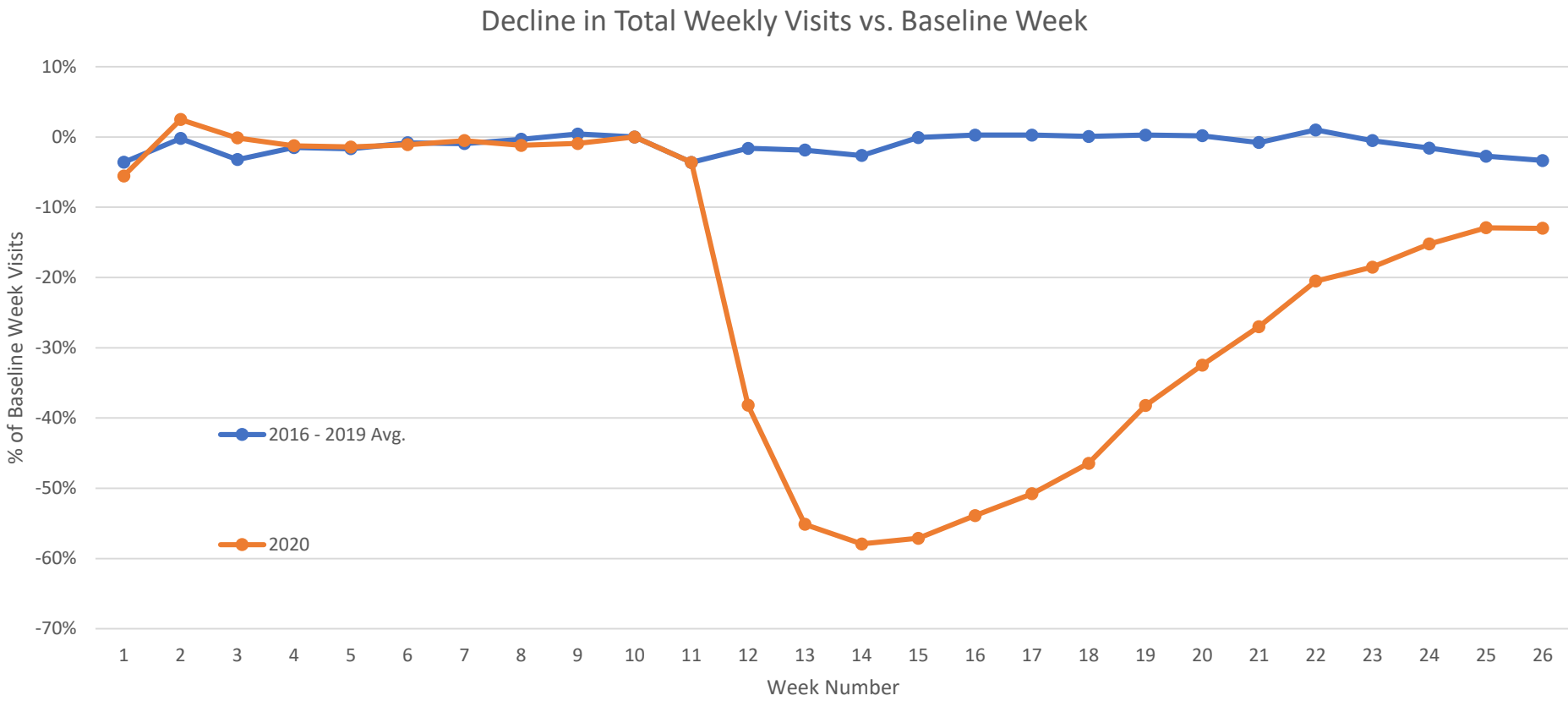
What I was hoping to cover

- Impact of pandemic on telemedicine use
- Equity concerns about telemedicine access



Early changes in pandemic

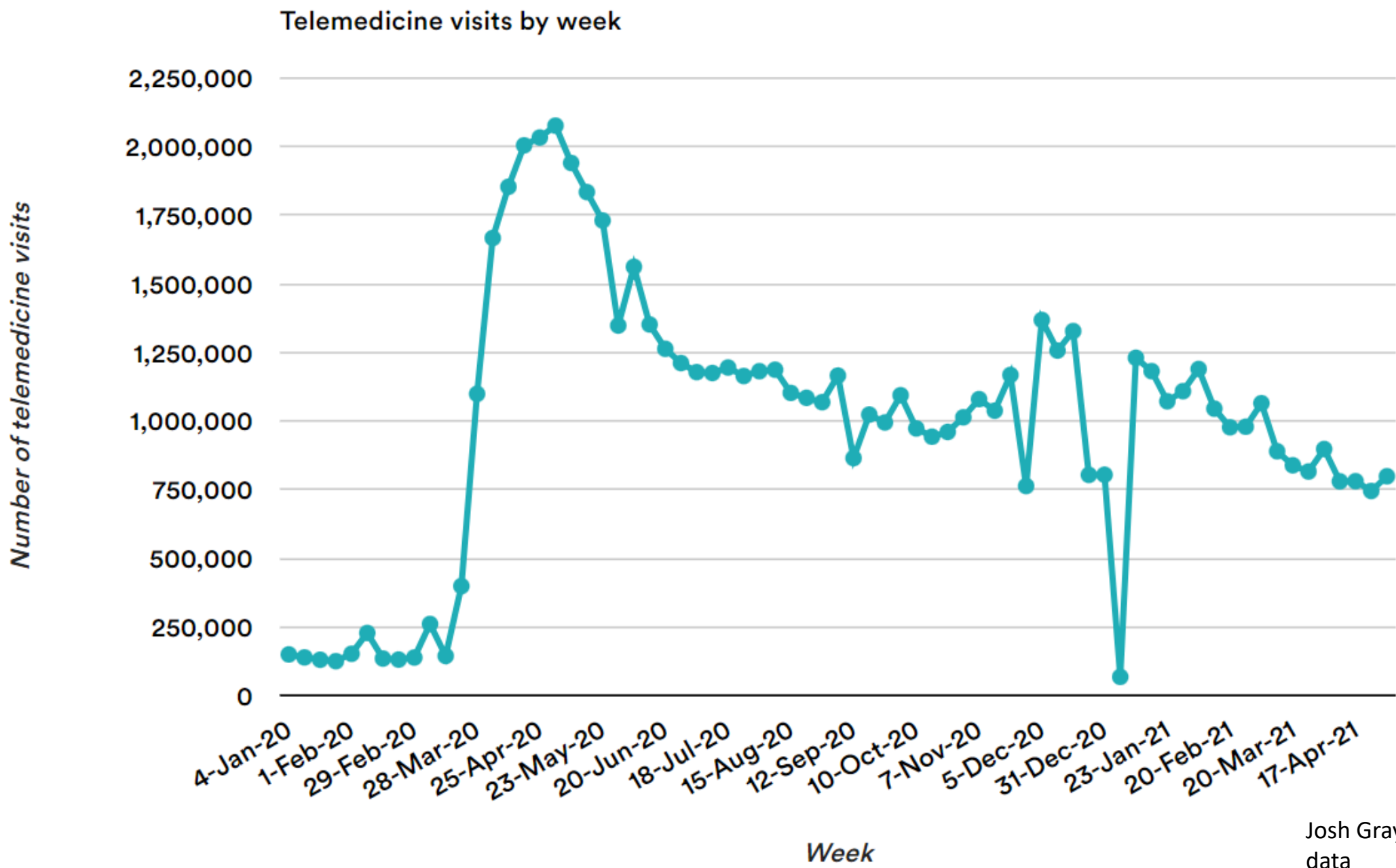
Volume of visits of any types in outpatient care fell by almost 60%



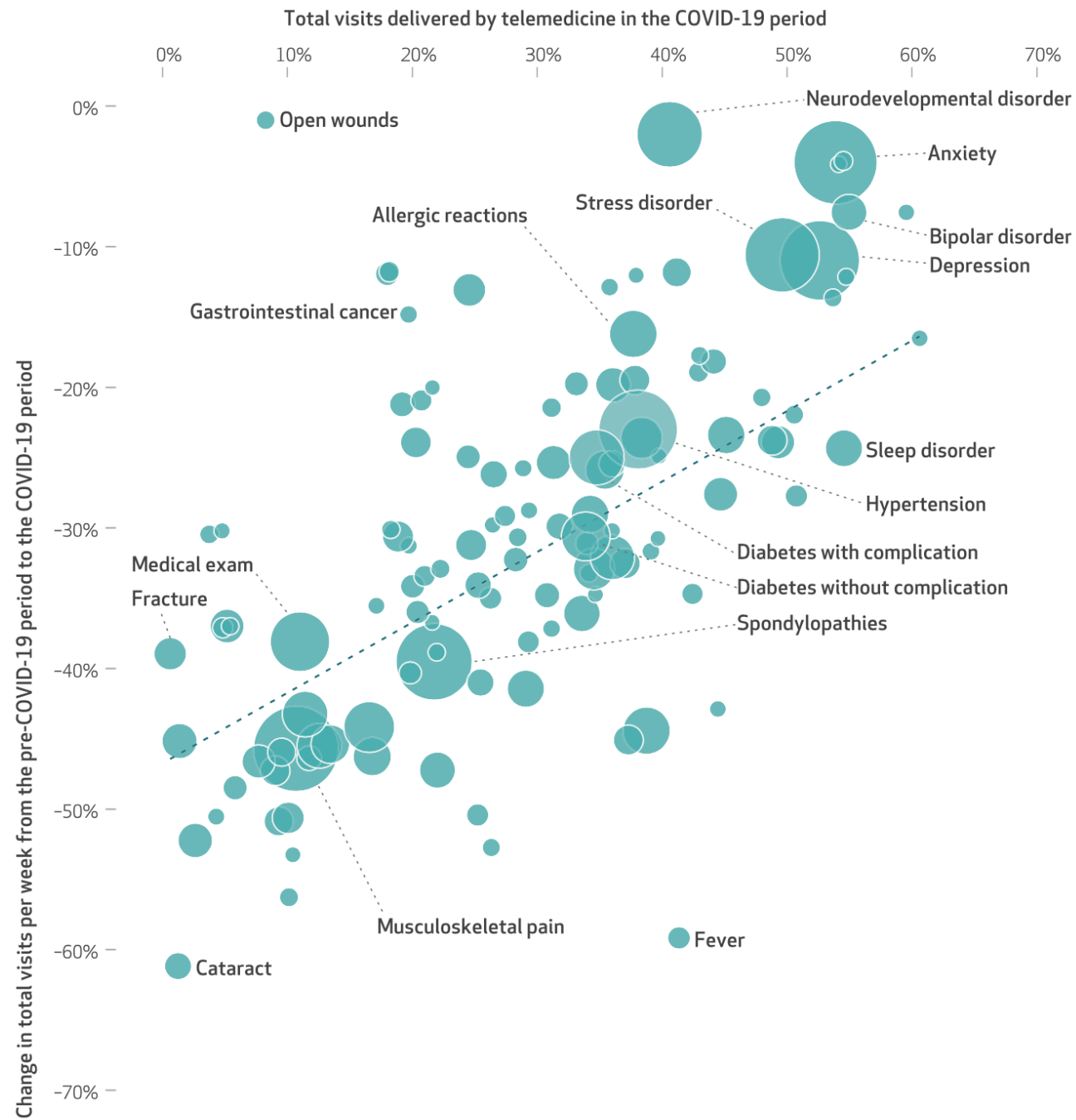
[The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Outpatient Care: Visits Return to Prepandemic Levels, but Not for All Providers and Patients](https://doi.org/10.26099/41xy-9m57)
(Commonwealth Fund, Oct. 2020). <https://doi.org/10.26099/41xy-9m57>

Telemedicine suddenly
became the norm



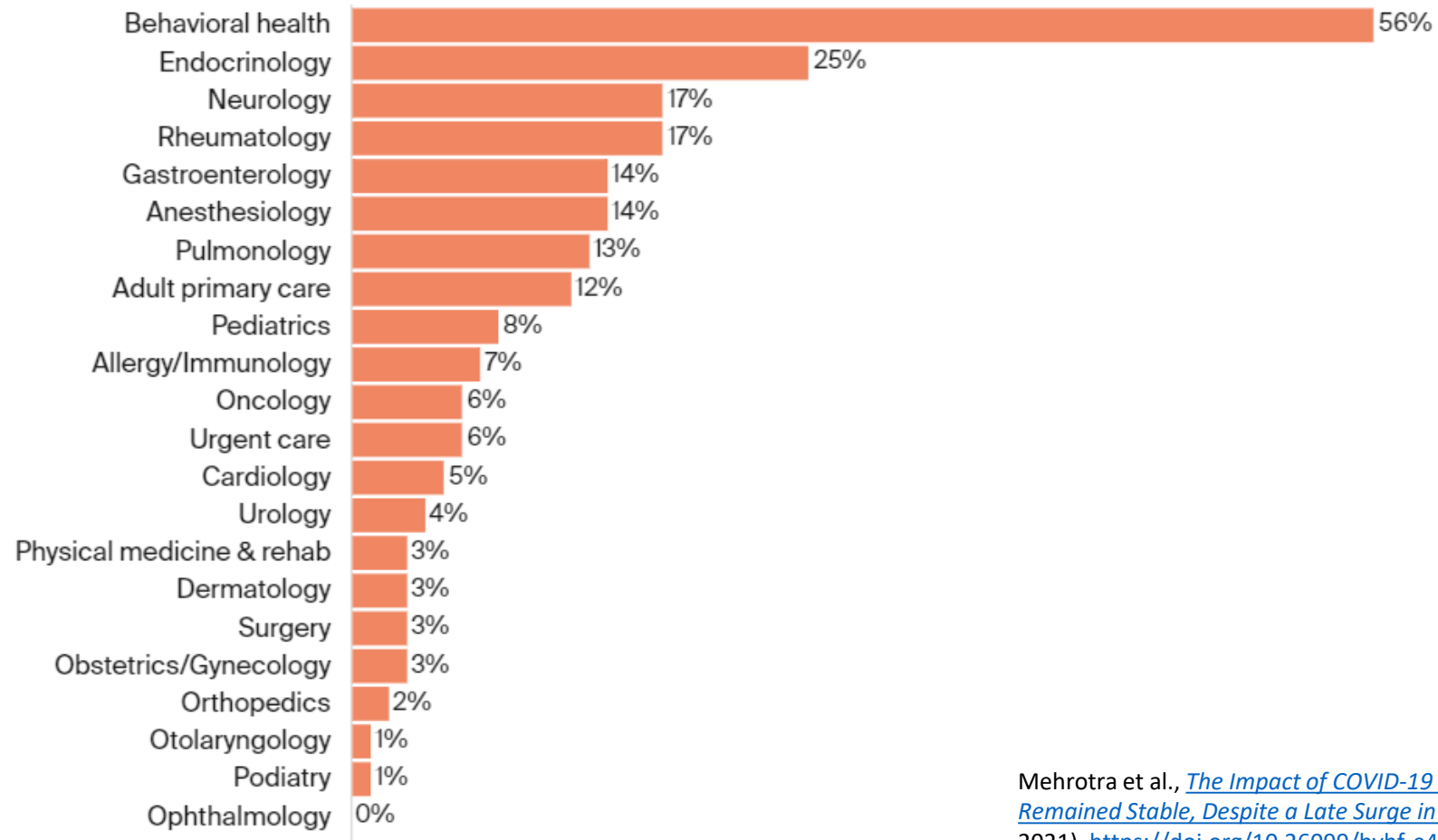


Josh Gray, STAT News, Medicare data



Variation in telemedicine use by specialty in December 2020

Telemedicine visits as a percentage of baseline



Mehrotra et al., [The Impact of COVID-19 on Outpatient Visits in 2020: Visits Remained Stable, Despite a Late Surge in Cases](https://doi.org/10.26099/bvvhf-e411) (Commonwealth Fund, Feb. 2021). <https://doi.org/10.26099/bvvhf-e411>

Out-of-state telemedicine use

- Jan-June 2021 Medicare data
- ~5% of telemedicine visits with an out-of-state provider
- >400K beneficiaries had out-of-state telemedicine visit
- Majority for primary care or mental illness treatment

Other forms of telehealth also surged

- 8x increase eConsults
- 5x increase Remote Patient Monitoring
- 13x increase telepsychiatry in emergency depts
 - Role of “telepresenters”
- 1.5x increase in patient portal messages

- Unpublished data from ongoing analyses
- Wilcock, Health Affairs, 3/22
- Personal communication, Josh Holzbauer at Epic

Countless telehealth-only companies emerging



Figure from Strategic Benefit Advisors



**Concerns about
equity**

HEALTH CARE POLICY AND LAW

Assessment of Disparities in Digital Access Among Medicare Beneficiaries and Implications for Telemedicine

In response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Medicare temporarily expanded its coverage of telemedicine to all beneficiaries, included visits in the patient's

home, and began paying for audio-only visits at the same rate as video and in-person visits.^{1,2} Previously, Medicare (with a few exceptions) limited telemedicine coverage to video visits for rural

beneficiaries and required video visits to take place at a medical facility, such as a physician's office, rather than at a patient's home.³

Access to technology at home and the ability to use technology may affect use of video or audio-only telemedicine visits by Medicare beneficiaries. Although evidence on the efficacy of video vs audio-only visits is lacking,⁴ audio-only visits might be inadequate in some situations, such as when visual monitoring or diagnosis is important for care. We examined disparities in digital access (ie, access at home to technology that enables video telemedicine visits) among Medicare beneficiaries by socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.



Related article



Supplemental content

Ensuring The Growth Of Telehealth During COVID-19 Does Not Exacerbate Disparities In Care

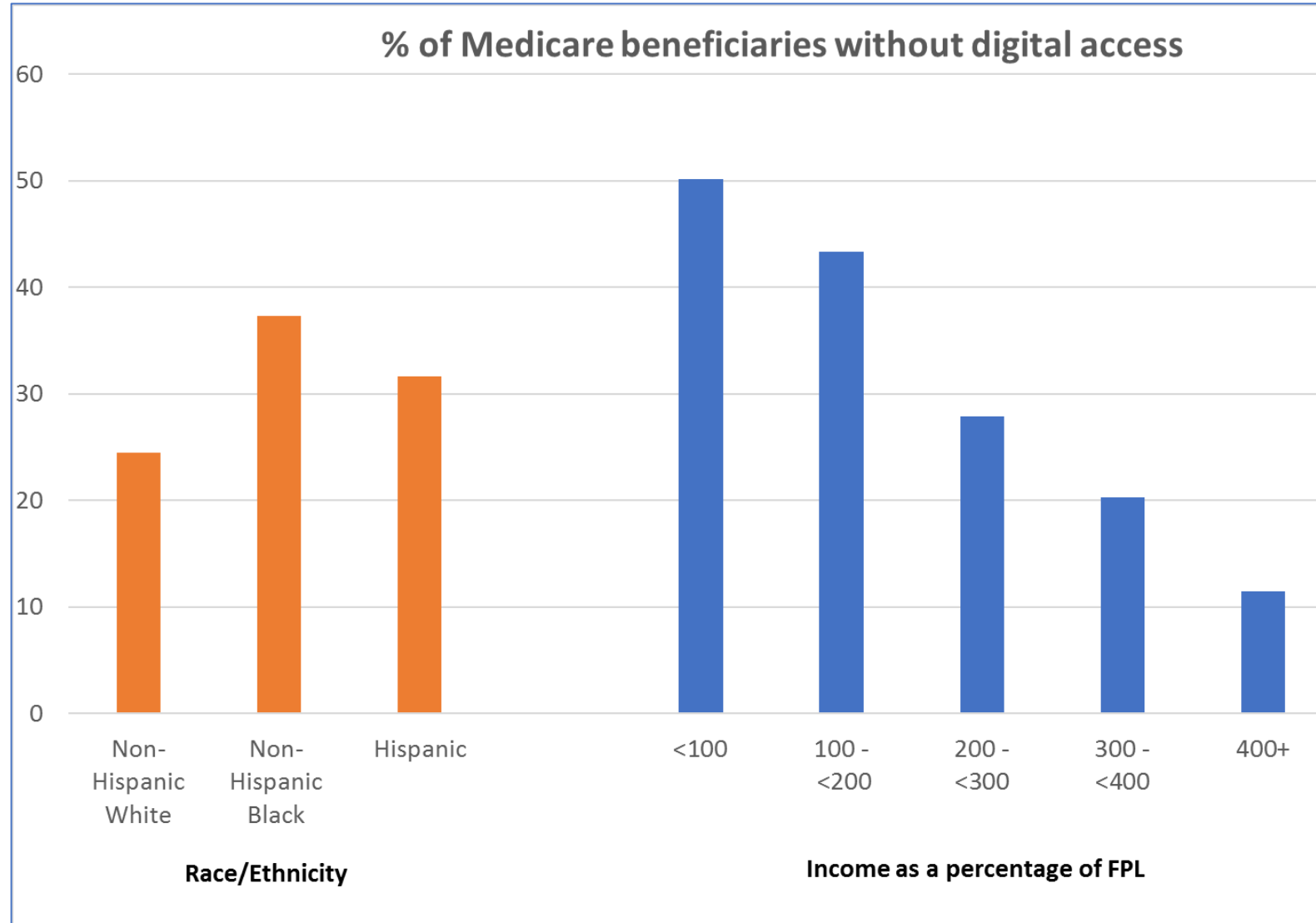
[David Velasquez](#), [Ateev Mehrotra](#)

MAY 8, 2020

10.1377/hblog20200505.591306

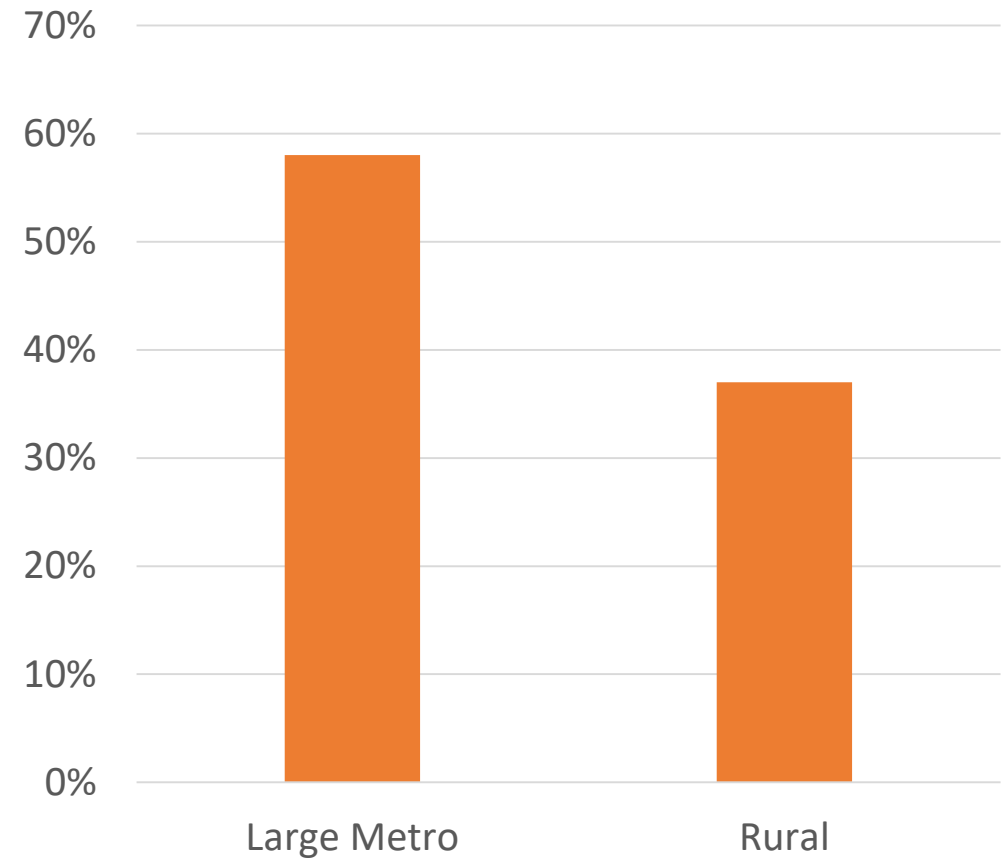
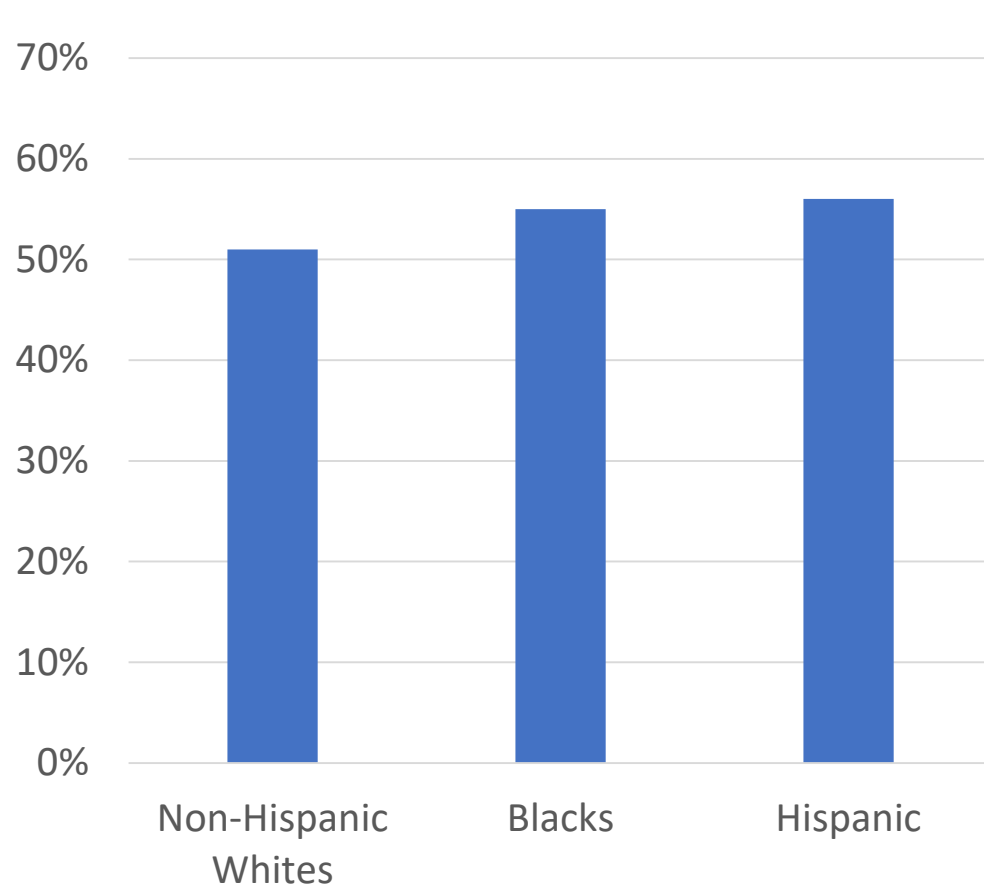


“Digital Divide”



Assessment of Disparities in Digital Access Among Medicare Beneficiaries and Implications for Telemedicine. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2020

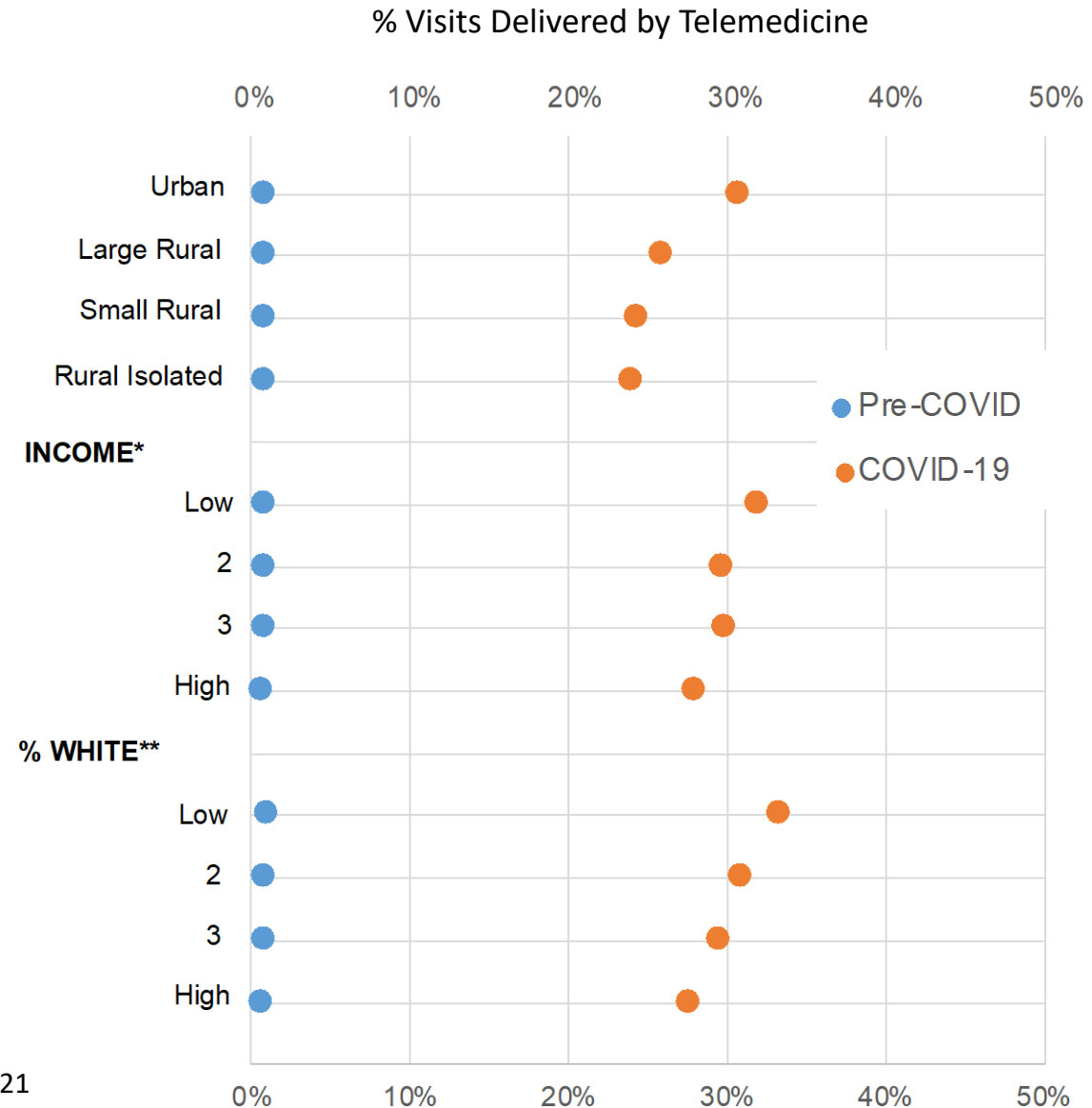
Disparities in fraction of Medicare patients who used telemedicine



Same pattern echoed in other work

Telemedicine use more common among:

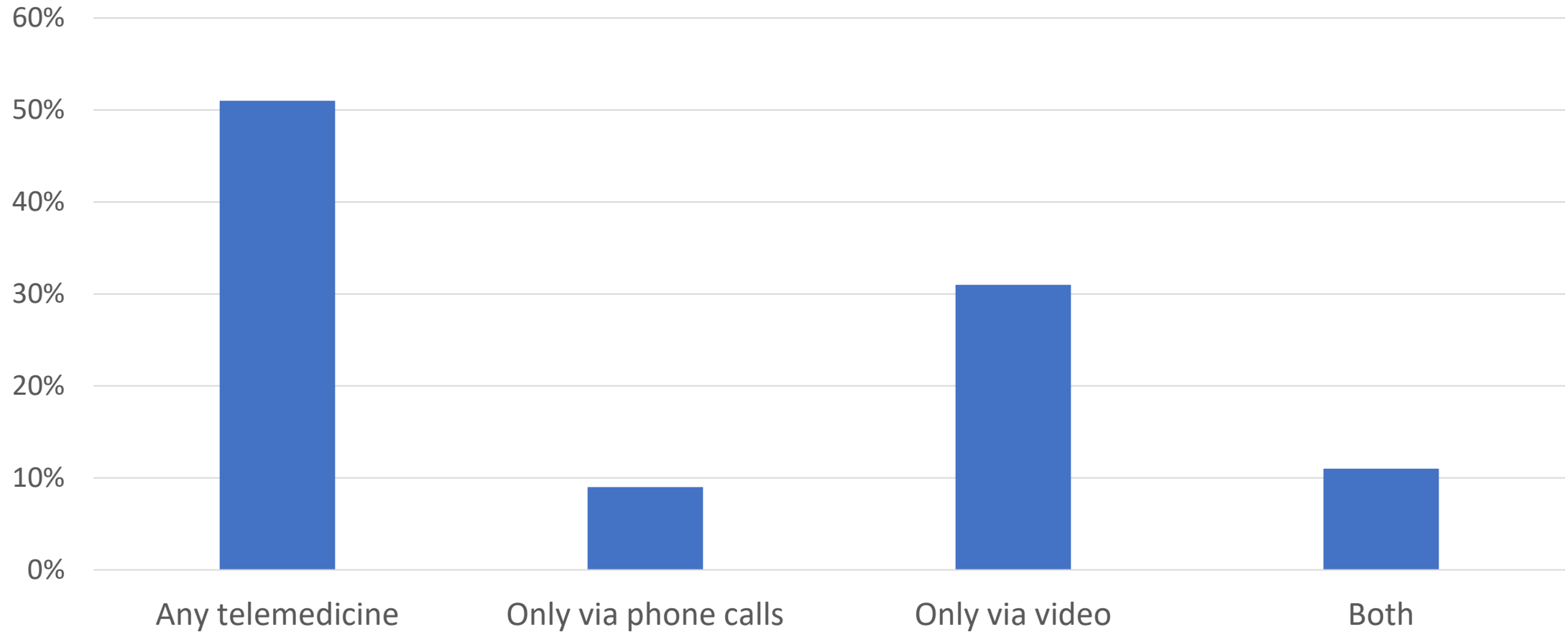
- Urban enrollees
- Counties with more minorities



Other Studies in Literature

- Mixed findings for telemedicine use by race/ethnicity
 - Less telemedicine use among ethnic/racial minority groups
 - Weber and co (*JAMIA*, 2020); Whaley and co (*JAMA NO*, 2020)
 - Greater telemedicine use among ethnic minorities
 - Jaffe and co (*Population Health Management*, 2020); Eberly and co (*JAMA NO*, 2020); Patel and co (*Health Affairs*, 2021)
- Rural areas consistently have less telemedicine use
 - Patel and co (*Health Affairs*, 2021); Patel and co (*JAMA NO*, 2021); Chu and co (*JMIR*, 2021); Jaffe and co (*Population Health Management*, 2020)

How are patients accessing telemedicine?



Summary

- Telehealth use has surged across a wide range of modalities and providers
- Substantial concerns about equity in access to video visits, but empirical data supporting those concerns inconsistent