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DIGITAL HEALTH PERCEPTIONS AMONG OLDER ADULTS IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Introduction: The challenge of healthcare provision has intensified due to demographic, epidemiological, and technological changes. In this context, the use of technology can enhance access to health services; however, certain digital resources still face resistance among users. The advancement of the SUS Digital Program, promoted by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, has sparked interest in the need for a deeper understanding of users' readiness to engage with these technologies, particularly in the context of population aging and persistent social inequalities.

Objective: To qualitatively describe the behaviors and perceptions of older adults regarding digital health within Primary Health Care.

Methods: This qualitative study involved 17 older adults receiving care at a Primary Health Unit in Ceilândia, Brasília/DF. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, encouraging participants to share their experiences and perspectives based on the following questions: (1) In general, what are your perceptions of technology? (2) In general, what are your perceptions of innovation? (3) In general, what are your perceptions of digital health? Responses were fully transcribed and analyzed using content and discourse analysis to identify meanings and relationships among the elements present in the participants' narratives (CAAE: 85606524.0.0000.5558).

Results: The questions used to elicit responses were interpreted as similar, indicating an understanding that digital health, technology, and innovation are overlapping concepts. During the interviews, the researcher provided examples of digital health resources, such as wearable monitoring devices and video consultations with healthcare professionals. Participants predominantly responded based on their personal experiences, positioning themselves as users of these technologies. Four groups of attitudes and behaviors were identified: (1) "It's good, but not for me"; (2) "It's good, but it's difficult"; (3) "It's good, and I want to learn"; (4) "More or less, I prefer in-person care."

Conclusion: The advancement of the SUS Digital Program, promoted by the Ministry of Health, has highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of user readiness, especially in light of population aging and enduring social inequalities. Therefore, it is crucial to develop strategies that support healthcare professionals and managers in implementing

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digital health technologies, taking into account the characteristics and needs of the target population.

Practical Implications

The study highlights the importance of tailoring digital health strategies to the diverse attitudes of older adults. To ensure effective implementation: Training and support should be offered to those willing to learn; Hybrid care models must be maintained to respect preferences for in-person care; Communication strategies should simplify and contextualize digital health concepts; Policy planning must consider varying levels of digital readiness to promote equity and inclusion.

Keywords: Public health; aging; health car.