More Skin Docs May Soon Use Selfies to Diagnose Patients

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As part of their office routine, some dermatologists already ask patients to use their mobile devices to snap a picture of a worrisome mole or skin rash and send it in for a look-see. The increasingly common practice is called teledermatology, and this digital evaluation could save you both time and money at the dermatologist, according to findings published in the journal JAMA Dermatology and reported by ABC News.

For the study, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania evaluated 50 patients who were already in the hospital for various reasons and also suffering from a skin issue that required an expert opinion.

Scientists took a picture of the participants' suspicious skin lesions then sent the images via a smartphone to two board-certified dermatologists for their opinion. Next, researchers compared these two virtual evaluations with the results of an in-person dermatological consultation.

Findings showed that the opinions of the two teledermatologists matched with the evaluation of the in-person dermatologist in nearly 95 percent of cases. When asked to suggest additional tests for the patients' skin issues, teledermatologists also agreed with their hospital-based colleagues almost 90 percent of the time.

Experts in the dermatology industry said the findings could hold a great deal of potential for dermatologists interested in treating patients who don't have easy access to health care or specialty clinics.

"By the use of innovative mobile technology, we can reach patients in rural communities that may not otherwise have access to health care," said Darrell Rigel, MD, PhD, a clinical professor of dermatology at New York University who was asked about the study.

But Rigel and other dermatologists wonder if using a mobile device visual to diagnose skin problems could ever truly replace a doctor's opportunity to scrutinize a troubling condition from every angle in person.

Indeed, scientists agreed that's a question only time and more research will answer.

Remember: Everyone, regardless of their skin color, is at risk of skin cancer. Click here to read more.

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