

'Selfie' Can Help Beat Eczema: Study

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While in-office visits may still be best, taking a photo of a skin lesion and sending it to your dermatologist for analysis may be a valuable piece of eczema care, a new study finds.

"This study shows something interesting -- patients' eczema improved regardless whether they saw the doctor for follow-up in the office or communicated online," said one expert not connected to the study, Dr Gary Goldenberg of New York City.

The new technology "gives patients another valuable option of communicating with their doctor," said Goldenberg, who is assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York City.

The new study was led by Dr. April Armstrong of the University of Colorado, Denver, and published online Oct. 22 in the journal *JAMA Dermatology*.

The study included 156 adults and children with eczema: 78 received typical in-person, follow-up care, while 78 received online follow-up care.

The patients in the online care group sent photos of skin outbreaks to dermatologists, who evaluated the photos, made treatment recommendations and prescribed medications.

After one year, clearance or near clearance of eczema was achieved by almost 44 percent of patients who received in-person care and more than 38 percent of those who received online care only.

The findings show that online dermatology services could help improve access to care in the United States at a time when there are not enough dermatologists to meet demand, the researchers said.

According to Goldenberg, Web-based care, "would be especially important for patients that live in rural areas or those that have transportation issues."

Dr. Doris Day is a dermatologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. She stressed that the office visit still has a big role to play in patient care, however.

"Atopic dermatitis and other chronic conditions often have a strong emotional component," she noted. "My experience is that the office visit is very important in building the physician-patient relationship and also for the physician to identify any other conditions, such as depression, and to support the patient's compliance in following their skin care regimen."