

Gaining Trust in the Use of Virtual Meetings for Health Technology Assessment during the COVID-19 Pandemic

HEALTH IMPROVEMENT SCOTLAND

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Introduction

The Health-Wellness Consortium (HWC) is the national health technology assessment (HTA) agency for Scotland. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all multi-stakeholder meetings moved to a virtual setting. HWC conducted an evaluation in order to establish stakeholder confidence in the ongoing use of virtual meetings.

Results

Survey respondents

150 respondents completed the survey (27 for HWC, 33 for HMC committees, and 90 for FMCs). The response rates were 85%, 65%, and 85%, respectively.

A wide range of stakeholders responded to the survey including committee members (HMC and FMC) across geographic locations (HMC and FMC), generalist and specialty representatives (HMC) and clinical experts (FMC).

Participants were satisfied overall with the virtual meetings

- 85% of respondents for HMC and 85% for HMC committee rated their experience of attending virtually as "very good" or "good".
- The majority of respondents would also be satisfied with joining the meeting virtually in the future (85% and 85%, respectively).
- All those who attended the FMC meetings were satisfied with the virtual meeting, and would attend virtually in the future.

Overall, how would you rate your experience of attending the meeting virtually?

Results

Technical issues during the virtual meetings were minimal

- 95% of respondents for HMC and 95% for HMC committee found the technology easy to use.
- 12 respondents were satisfied with the technology in the FMC meeting (response rate 33%), with one participant feeling it could be easy to use (fair).
- Technical issues were reported by some of the participants (20% for HMC and 20% for HMC committee, respectively).
- Three participants at the FMC meetings mentioned technical issues. These included problems with the screen freezing and audio being interrupted.
- Most technical issues were resolved quickly.

Participants were satisfied with different aspects of the virtual meetings

Below are the percentage of respondents rating each aspect of the virtual HMC meeting as "very good" or "good"

- Clear communication from questions (94%)
- Clear opportunity to participate (92%)
- Quality of virtual presentations (92%)
- Quality of sound (85%)
- Equipment in virtual rooms (77%)
- Support provided during the meeting (66%)

Similarly high levels of stakeholder satisfaction were reported for HMC and FMC meetings (at 85% or above). Technical issues were only noted in HMC committee meetings.

Improving the virtual meeting

What worked well

One of the key benefits was not having to travel to attend meetings and the use of Power/One allows to complement virtual presentations, which were not used previously in the F2F meetings. Participants also commented that the meeting programme was clear and that the meeting was well-attended and engaged.

Some examples of the comments below:

"Technology worked well (and the video and/or audio were commented clearly)". Participant at HMC committee meeting.

"What I liked well is that all essential points could attend without geographical being a potential barrier". Participant at FMC meeting.

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Conclusions

Across all committees, stakeholder was high and technical issues were minimal. Virtual meetings have positive implications for the accessibility of HTA. Stakeholders, considering and recorded views may be less in the virtual environment. Encouraging participants to bring their views on during discussions may help to replace a F2F setting. Virtual committee meetings may offer functionality with no presentation slides, which may help to reduce deliberation discussion during. Finally, this may be an opportunity to F2F meetings. Continued engagement will help HWC overcome stakeholder confidence in virtual meetings.

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VIRTUAL ISPOR 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) is the national health technology assessment (HTA) agency for medicines. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all multi-stakeholder meetings moved to a virtual setting. We conducted an evaluation in order to establish stakeholder confidence in the ongoing use of virtual meetings.

METHODS

Survey development and distribution

A survey consisting of 13 questions was developed, exploring user satisfaction, technical issues, what worked well, and areas for improvement. The survey was developed using SmartSurvey. The survey link was distributed to participants of the three main committees of SMC: the New Drugs Committee (NDC); Patient and Clinician Engagement (PACE); and SMC committee. The participants attended meetings held between June and October 2020.

Platform used for the virtual meetings

NDC and PACE meetings were held using MS Teams; SMC committee meetings were held using Zoom videoconferencing. The choice of platform reflected the availability of wider functionality; for example, break out rooms to allow private voting by ballot.

RESULTS

Survey respondents

155 respondents completed the survey (47 for NDC, 93 for SMC committee, and 15 for PACE). The response rates were 48%, 42%, and 38% respectively.

A wide range of stakeholders responded to the survey including: committee members (SMC and NDC); patient group representatives/advocates (SMC and PACE); pharmaceutical company representatives (SMC); and clinical experts (PACE).

Participants were satisfied overall with the virtual meetings

- 98% of respondents for NDC and 89% for SMC committee rated their experience of attending virtually as "very good" or "good".
- The majority of respondents would also be satisfied with joining the meeting virtually in the future (96% and 93%, respectively).
- All those who attended the PACE meetings were satisfied with the virtual meeting, and with attending virtually in the future.

Overall, how would you rate your experience of attending the meeting virtually?

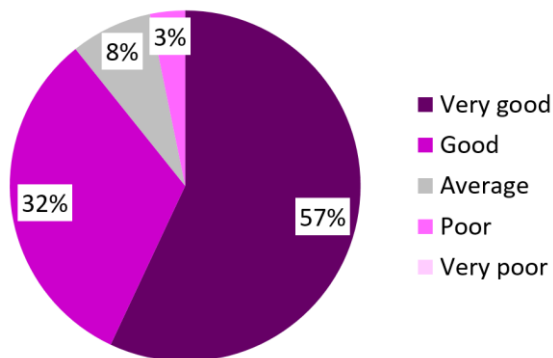


Figure: User satisfaction with the virtual SMC committee meeting.

Participants who had previously attended F2F were satisfied with the virtual meetings

- 60% of respondents for NDC and 57% for SMC committee had previously attended the meeting when it was held F2F (before the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Of those respondents, the majority rated the virtual meeting as better or the same (83% and 82%, respectively).
- Four participants had previously attended the PACE meeting when it was held F2F, all rating the virtual meeting as better or the same.

How was your experience of the virtual meeting compared to before?

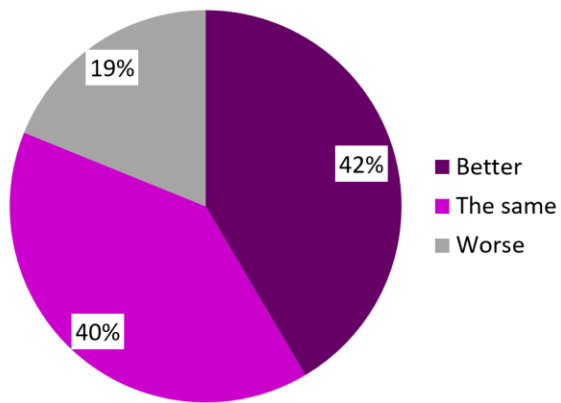


Figure: User satisfaction with the virtual SMC committee meeting, compared to when it was held F2F.

RESULTS

Technical issues during the virtual meetings were minimal

- 98% of respondents for NDC and 95% for SMC committee found the technology easy to use.
- 14 respondents were satisfied with the technology at the PACE meeting (represent 93%), with one participant finding it neither easy nor difficult.
- Technical issues were reported by some of the participants (33% for NDC and 12% for SMC committee, respectively).
- Three participants at the PACE meetings encountered technical issues. These included problems with the screen freezing and unmuting their microphone.
- Most technical issues were resolved quickly.

Participants were satisfied with different aspects of the virtual meetings

Below are the percentage of respondents rating each aspect of the virtual SMC meeting as "very good" or "good".

- Clear communication from speakers (94%)
- Clear opportunity to participate (86%)
- Quality of visual presentations (92%)
- Quality of sound (84%)
- Experience in breakout rooms (77%)
- Support provided during the meeting (98%)

Similarly high levels of user satisfaction were reported for NDC and PACE meetings (all 92% or above). Break-out rooms were only used in SMC committee meetings.

IMPROVING THE VIRTUAL MEETING

What worked well

One of the key benefits was not having to travel to attend meetings and the use of PowerPoint slides to complement verbal presentations, which were not used previously in the F2F meetings. Participants also commented that the meeting etiquette was clear, and that the meeting was well-chaired and organised.

Some examples of the comments below:

"Technology worked well [and] the rules and etiquette were communicated clearly" - Participant at SMC committee meeting

"What [...] worked well is that all interested parties could attend, without geography/travel being a potential barrier" - Participant at PACE meeting

What could be improved

The main areas for improvement were:

- Clarifying when cameras should be used
- Duration of meetings and number of comfort breaks
- Consistency of the presentation slides
- The opportunities for networking and informal interaction
- Quality of discussion

Regarding the latter, some reported that it can be easier to interact F2F, and that non-verbal cues and body language are missing in the virtual setting. For example, one participant made the following comment:

"I find remote meetings much harder to interact with and feel the quality of discussion is much poorer than F2F" - Participant at SMC committee meeting

Future steps

Any technical issues raised by respondents in the survey were immediately highlighted to the meeting organisers. Implementation of the suggested improvements is ongoing. For example, some commented that the purpose and expected duration of the break-out rooms at SMC committee meetings was unclear. This has been addressed in the technical brief that is provided for the meeting. The feedback has been considered by SMC Executive who have recommended a move to a hybrid meeting format (mix of virtual and F2F) post-COVID.

CONCLUSIONS

Across all committees, user satisfaction was high and technical issues were minimal. Virtual meetings have important implications for the accessibility of HTA. Nevertheless, networking and nonverbal cues may be lost in the virtual environment. Encouraging participants to keep their cameras on during discussion may help to replicate a F2F setting. Virtual committee meetings can offer functionality such as presentation slides, which may help to facilitate deliberative decision-making. Notably, this may be an improvement to F2F meetings. Continuous improvement will help SMC maintain stakeholder confidence in virtual meetings.