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# Use of telemedicine for post-discharge assessment of the surgical wound

GlobalSurg Collaborative; NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery

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1	Use of telemedicine for post-discharge assessment of the surgical wound: international
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#### 28 Introduction

29 Telemedicine has now become a core component of health service delivery. During COVID-30 19 outbreaks, patients have been encouraged not to return to hospital for in-person 31 assessment after surgery due to fear of SARS-CoV-2 transmission [1-4]. Use of 32 telemedicine in surgical follow-up has rapidly increased, but without opportunity for detailed 33 evaluation [5-7]. If telemedicine assessment is not standardised it risks underreporting or 34 misidentification of complications, and harm for patients. Better understanding the capacity 35 to deliver telemedicine in the surgical setting and the accuracy of remote assessment for 36 common complications will be fundamental to the pandemic recovery effort [8, 9]. This may 37 be particularly important in low-resource settings where, even pre-pandemic, patients had to 38 travel longer distances to hospital and risk catastrophic expenditure as a result of a surgical 39 episode [10].

40

41 Surgical site infection (SSI) is the most common complication of surgery, with a high burden 42 of morbidity, detriment to quality of life and economic consequences for both patients and 43 providers [11-14]. It has global impact with variation in risk across settings [15]. SSI often 44 presents after patients' have left hospital after surgery [16]. The current accepted standard in 45 surgical site infection assessment requires an in-person review by an appropriately trained 46 clinician, according to US Centre for Disease Control Criteria (CDC) [17]. In accordance with 47 this framework, patients must travel back to hospital as an outpatient, or for a clinician to 48 visit them in the community. Whilst telemedicine is an attractive target for assessment of the 49 surgical wound, the evidence for its adoption remains limited. Quality of wound assessment 50 is proportionate to the reported rate of SSI [18, 19]. Even in randomised trials, where SSI is 51 a secondary rather than primary outcome the reported rate of SSI is twice as low [18]. 52 Unstandardised telemedicine assessment therefore risks delay to timely intervention and 53 introduction of research bias [20, 21].

54

- 56 The aims of this cohort study, and systematic review with meta-analysis were to whether
- 57 telemedicine wound assessment in feasible across different settings, and to compare the
- 58 rates of SSI reported using telemedicine and in-person follow-up.

60

#### 61 Methods

# 62 Part 1. Cohort study

63 This was a pre-planned, secondary analysis of a prospective, international, multi-centre

64 cohort study conducted across the GlobalSurg Collaborative network (GlobalSurg-2) [22].

65 Detailed methodology for the study has been previously published [15]. Each contributing

66 institution sought and obtained ethical and institutional approval according to local

67 regulations. This study was registered with Clinical Trials.gov (NCT02662231).

68

# 69 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Any centre performing elective and/or emergency abdominal surgery was invited to participate. Local investigators used consecutive sampling to include all patients undergoing elective (planned) or emergency (unplanned) gastrointestinal resection within discrete 2week periods. Both open and minimally invasive approaches were eligible. Both adults and children (of any age) were eligible for inclusion. Patients were excluded where the primary identification for surgery was vascular, gynaecological, obstetric, urological, or for transplantation.

77

78 Data variables and data collection

Data were collected using a secure, password-encrypted, web-hosted Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) system. Participating centres were grouped into tertiles according to the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI). A full description of the data variables collected is available in the primary report of this study [15]. Data variables were chosen pragmatically to be objective, easily standardised and internationally relevant to minimise missing data and maximise data quality. Independent data validation was performed for case ascertainment and data accuracy.

#### 87 Classification of follow-up method

88 Investigators were asked to actively monitor patients up to 30-day after surgery, and 89 performed an assessment for SSI at 30-days after surgery by one of three methods: (1) 90 Telemedicine review (telephone and/or video assessment), which was not standardised in 91 the study, but was performed according to local practice and informed by CDC criteria; (2) 92 In-person clinical review, either during an outpatient clinic appointment or a community visit 93 in accordance with CDC criteria; (3) Inpatient only, with in-hospital assessment and review 94 of patient notes and electronic records up to 30-days after surgery (i.e., no contact made 95 after discharge). Patients that remained an inpatient at 30-days postoperatively were 96 excluded from analysis (including those that were readmitted and were in hospital at 30-days 97 after surgery). Patients that were readmitted and discharged before 30-days after surgery 98 had an independent 30-day assessment of their SSI status.

99

#### 100 Outcome measures

The primary outcome measure was surgical site infection reported up to 30-days after surgery defined according to the US Centre for Disease Control criteria [14]. We included both superficial and deep infections but excluded organ space infection, which has a different biological mechanism (e.g., anastomotic leak, gross contamination). Training in the CDC criteria for SSI diagnosis was provided to all investigators using an online training module. The secondary outcome measure was 30-day postoperative mortality rate (POMR) with day 0 as the day of surgery.

108

109 Statistical analysis

110 Differences in characteristics and the reported rates of SSI between telemedicine, in-person

111 and inpatient only follow-up were tested with the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test for categorical variables

and with the Kruskal-Wallis test for continuous variables. There is likely to be variation in the

113 methods of adoption of telemedicine across different resource settings. Global variation was

114 explored by stratifying comparisons between high-HDI, middle-HDI and low-HDI countries to 115 explore whether patterns were consistent across health systems. Multilevel logistic 116 regression models were constructed to explore associations between the method of follow-117 up and the SSI rate reported. Characteristics and outcomes of patients with no post-118 discharge assessment (inpatient only) were described for transparency, but were excluded 119 from multivariable modelling. Adjustment for case mix was performed using patient, disease 120 and operation-specific factors, informed by a casual model constructed to inform covariable 121 selection and presented using a Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG). Country was incorporated as 122 random effects with a constrained gradient. Discrimination of the model was determined 123 using the C-statistic (area under the receiver operating curve characteristic). Model 124 coefficients were presented as adjusted odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI). 125 To account for death after surgery as a competing risk, patients who died before 30-day 126 follow-up were excluded in a sensitivity analysis of the primary analysis. A second sensitivity 127 analysis was conducted including only patients with a postoperative length of stay of 14 days 128 or less. A third sensitivity analysis included elective cancer surgery only. The final sensitivity 129 analysis was performed in propensity score matched (PSM) groups to address a risk of 130 selection bias and counterfactuals [23, 24] (full methodology in Appendix A). Subgroup 131 analyses were performed for the primary analysis across high versus middle or low HDI 132 countries. To explore risk of reverse causation (i.e., patients with serious postoperative 133 complications seeking in-person review) we looked for associations between follow-up 134 method and 30-day POMR. All analyses were done using the R Foundation Statistical 135 Program version 4.1.1 (packages: finalfit, tidyverse, boot, Matchlt, cem, randomForests).

# 136 Part 2. Systematic review and meta-analysis

A systematic database search was performed according to a pre-published protocol
(PROSPERO:192596) and followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and
Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidance. Studies reporting surgical site infection rates detected
using telemedicine and in-person assessment after non-cardiac surgery were included. Data

141 extracted from published studies was combined with cohort data and a meta-analysis142 performed with all available data.

143

144 Database search and report characteristics

A search strategy was constructed using Medline, EMBASE and PubMed to identify two key concepts within published literature: (1) surgical site infection and (2) telemedicine. The full search strategy for the review is available in the *Appendix B*. All included studies assessed a proportion of patients both by telemedicine and in-person follow-up. The full inclusion and exclusion criteria are reported in *Appendix C*.

150

# 151 Outcome measures

The primary outcome measure was the rate of surgical site infection reported up to 30-days after surgery in the study. In the meta-analysis, this was defined pragmatically according to any classification system adopted (US CDC, ASEPSIS or Public Health England), or diagnosis by a clinician. The secondary outcome measure was the proportion of patients undergoing telemedicine versus in-person follow-up.

157

# 158 Data extraction and analysis

Full texts were retrieved for all studies that potentially met the inclusion criteria. Any disagreement on eligibility of studies was resolved through consensus discussion with a third reviewer. Data on the proportion of patients with an SSI reported by telemedicine and by inperson follow-up, and the proportion of patients that underwent telemedicine follow-up were extracted from eligible study, and combined with data from the cohort study in *Part 1*. Data extraction was performed and cross-checked for accuracy by two reviewers.

165

166 Data analysis was performed using R Foundation Statistical Program version 3.1 (packages:

167 meta, metabin). Outcome measures were quantitatively summarised where data were

168 available. Firstly, meta-analysis performed to estimate the pooled mean proportions of 169 patients followed-up using telemedicine. Secondly, meta-analysis was performed to 170 compare the reported SSI rates with telemedicine and in-person follow-up. Heterogeneity 171 among study estimates was quantified using the  $l^2$  and an associated test for heterogeneity. As heterogeneity was likely to be high, the DerSimonian and Laird random effects (RE) 172 173 method was used to pool estimates, with inverse-variance weights. A subgroup analysis was 174 performed of data from high versus low and middle-income countries. (packages: metaprop, 175 meta).

176

#### 177 Risk of bias assessment

178 Risk of bias was assessed for non-randomised studies using the ROBINS-I tool. As this was
179 not a clinical effectiveness study, a GRADE level of evidence assessment was not deemed
180 to be required.

181

# 182 **Results**

# 183 Part 1. Cohort study

184 Methods of post-discharge follow-up

185 Overall, 15358 of 16015 patients (95.9%) were discharged before 30-days postoperatively

186 and were included in this analysis. Of these patients, 6907 underwent telemedicine review

187 (45.0%), 6171 in-person review (40.2%), and 2280 inpatient only assessment (14.8%).

188

#### 189 Use of telemedicine

- 190 Telemedicine was used across 51 of 66 contributing countries spanning high (n=23), middle
- 191 (n=16) and low-HDI (n=12) settings (*Figure 1*). In high-HDI settings 36.7% (3113/8492) of
- 192 included patients were followed-up using telemedicine. The telemedicine follow-up rates
- were higher in both middle-HDI (61.4%, 3075/5006), and low-HDI settings (38.7%,

194 719/1860). Telemedicine was used for patients of both sexes (41.8%, of male patients, and
195 47.1% of female patients) and all age ranges, including both the youngest (2 to 20 years;
196 46.6%, 1003/2151) and oldest age groups (80 to 100 years; 31.8%, 154/485). Telemedicine
197 was used to follow-up patients with a range of ASA grades, underlying pathologies and
198 presenting for both elective and emergency care (*Table 1*).

199

#### 200 Characteristics of patients by follow-up group

201 There were significant differences in the baseline risk characteristics of the groups that 202 underwent telemedicine, in-person, and inpatient only follow-up. Notably, patients that underwent surgery for malignancy were less likely to have telephone review than in-person 203 204 clinical review (34.6% versus 55.6%, p<0.001). Patients undergoing emergency surgery 205 were more likely to have telephone review than clinical review (43.8% versus 38.3%, 206 p<0.001). Patients from high income countries (p<0.001), with gallstone disease or 207 appendicitis as their indication for surgery (p<0.001), or that underwent emergency surgery 208 (p<0.001) were most likely to have inpatient only assessment.

209

# 210 Reporting of surgical site infection

In this study, 11.2% (1721/15358) of patients had an SSI reported, and 5.5% (843/15358)
had an unknown SSI status. The rate of SSI reported was slightly lower with telemedicine
(11.1%, 766/6907) and lower with inpatient only follow-up (5.7%, 129/2280) than with inperson follow-up (13.4%, 826/6171, p<0.001). Of patients that had SSI reported, 44.5%</li>
(766/1721) of diagnoses were made using telemedicine, 48.0% (826/1721) in-person and
7.5% (129/1721) with inpatient only assessment.

217

*Figure 1* shows the unadjusted SSI rates by method of follow-up, stratified by HDI tertile.
'Unknown' SSI status was higher in groups undergoing inpatient only assessment than

220 telephone review or in-person clinical review groups; this difference was largest across

221 middle- and low-HDI settings (p<0.001). Small differences were observed in reported SSI 222 rates (unadjusted) following telemedicine and in-person review across high- (7.3% 223 (222/3043) versus 11.4% (432/3793)), middle- (13.3% (396/2971) versus 12.9% (169/1305)) 224 and low-HDI (20.7% (148/716) versus 22.8% (225/989)) countries. Unadjusted SSI rates 225 with telephone follow-up and in-person clinical follow-up were comparable across strata of 226 intra-abdominal contamination (Table 2, Supplementary figure 1). Inpatient only assessment 227 had a lower recorded rate of SSI in high-income settings (5.1% (69/1355)), but a higher rate 228 of SSI reported in middle- (15.3% (42/274)), and low-income settings (26.1% (18/69)) 229 respectively.

230

231 Our proposed casual model is displayed in Figure 2. Upon univariable analysis, the odds of 232 reporting an SSI following telemedicine assessment (OR 0.81, 0.73-0.90, p<0.001) was 233 lower than in-person (reference). After multivariable adjustment telemedicine assessment 234 was associated with lower odds of reporting SSI than in-person review (OR 0.73, 0.64-235 0.84, p<0.001, Figure 3). This was consistent in sensitivity analyses including patients that 236 were alive at 30-days after surgery only (Supplementary table 2) that had a postoperative 237 length of stay of 14 days or less (Supplementary table 3), elective cancer surgery only 238 (Supplementary table 4) propensity score matched analysis (Supplementary table 5 and 6), 239 and on subgroup analysis by HDI group (Supplementary figure 2). 10 240

# 241 Systematic review and combined meta-analysis

#### 242 Search results

From 1299 de-duplicated search results, 25 full papers reported an SSI rate detected using
telemedicine. 28.0% had no comparator group (7/25), and 36.0% (9/25) compared
telemedicine to assessment at a different time point (e.g., in-hospital versus 30-day
telemedicine assessment). Nine eligible studies were therefore included [25-33]. Summary

- data from the cohort study in *Part 1* was combined with these nine studies for qualitativesynthesis (Figure 3).
- 249
- 250 Study characteristics
- 251 Of the included studies, 66.7% (6/9) were published within the last five years (2015-2020)
- [25, 26, 29-32]. Eight were prospective cohort studies, with one retrospective study[30]. Most
- 253 reported data from high-income countries (55.6%, 5/9) [27, 28, 30, 32, 33]; 1 was from an
- upper-middle income country [31] and 3 from lower-middle income countries [25, 26, 29]. No
- 255 data from low-income countries or multi-country studies were reported. Of included articles,
- 44.4% (4/9) reported outcome assessment in patients undergoing general surgery [26, 29,
- 257 31, 33], 22.2% (2/9) in trauma and orthopaedics [27, 28], 11.1% (1/9) in obstetric surgery
- [30], and 22.2% (2/9) in all non-cardiac surgery [25, 32]. There was a moderate or severe
- risk of bias in all included studies (*Supplementary Figure 4*).
- 260
- 261 Use of telemedicine
- The proportion of patients with follow-up using telemedicine ranged from 45% to 96%. Study
  sizes ranged from 141 to 11225 patients. The pooled proportion of patients with
- telemedicine follow up on meta-analysis was 64% (95% C.I. 55% to 73%). There was very
- high heterogeneity ( $I^2=100\%$ , p<0.001).
- 266

# 267 Delivery of telemedicine

- 268 Four included studies did not state a standardised schedule for outcome assessment. 22.2%
- 269 (2/9) used the Public Health England Post-discharge Surveillance Questionnaire [25, 29] and
- 270 33.3% (3/9) used questions based on CDC criteria [27, 28, 33]. 77.8% (7/9) were used as a
- one-off assessment at 30 postoperative days [25-27, 30-33], with two using serial
- 272 postoperative assessments [28, 29].
- 273
- 274 Comparison of telemedicine to in-person follow-up

275 Four studies involved a comparator of telemedicine to in-person follow-up method [25-28] 276 and were included in meta-analysis of SSI rates reported, combined with the cohort study 277 data (5 studies in total). Two studies had paired within-subject measurements at the same 278 time point [25, 28], and two had measurements at the same time point but in different patient 279 groups [26, 27]. Only two (50%) compared telemedicine to an in-person assessment 280 according to US Centre for Disease Control criteria (Table 3). In the random effects meta-281 analysis, the rate of SSI reported using telemedicine was significantly lower in the 282 telemedicine group than the in-person group (0.67, 95% C.I. 0.47 to 0.94). There was some 283 evidence of between-study heterogeneity, but this did not have a significant effect on the 284 random effects meta-analysis (I<sup>2</sup>=0.45, 0.00-0.78, p=0.12; Tau=0.27, 0.00-0.93; Figure 5). 285 There was no significant evidence of funnel plot asymmetry (Supplementary figure 5, 286 p=0.326).

287

288 Comparison of telemedicine to other follow-up methods

289 Five studies compared telemedicine to a follow-up method that did not require in-person 290 review (e.g., Electronic Health Records or postal questionnaire) [29-33]. These are 291 summarised in Table 3 but excluded in the meta-analysis of SSI rates. Four of five studies 292 had a higher rate of reporting of SSI in the telemedicine group than the electronic health 293 records or postal questionnaire group. One study had a much lower SSI rate reported by 294 telemedicine than electronic health records (1.1% versus 11.2%), but the two methods were 295 applied in clearly different patient populations (responders to a postal questionnaire versus 296 non-responders) [29].

298 Discussion

299 300 This cohort study and meta-analysis identified that use of telemedicine for wound 301 assessment post-discharge is feasible across settings. The adjusted rate of SSI reported 302 using telemedicine in patients that underwent post-discharge assessment was lower than 303 with in-person follow-up in the international cohort study, raising concerns of underreporting 304 of SSI. This was robust to several sensitivity analyses, a propensity score-matched model 305 and across HDI settings. This analysis of real-world, global data suggests that telemedicine 306 methods used in the pre-pandemic setting may risk patient safety or introduce bias to 307 research studies. This was corroborated in the combined meta-analysis. The studies 308 included were of low quality, and rarely used standardised tools. High-quality frameworks for 309 remote assessment of SSI must be evaluated and adopted as telemedicine is upscaled 310 globally.

311

312 Telemedicine for follow-up of surgical patients holds significant promise during the SARS-313 CoV-2 pandemic recovery effort. The high connectivity of global telecommunication 314 networks opens opportunities for telemedicine in both well-resourced and resource 315 constrained settings [34]. Efficient methods for surgical follow-up may be most relevant in 316 LMICs where patients may already travel long distances or take time out of work to return to 317 hospital after discharge, and health systems face severe resource limitations [35-318 39]. During future SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks, use of telemedicine may reduce the risk of 319 exposure in hospital outpatient settings [2]. During the post-pandemic recovery, it may help 320 alleviate the growing backlog of outpatient appointments and investigations that health 321 systems face around the world [40-42]. However, as the use of these methods increases, it 322 is important that the quality of assessment does not decrease. Delayed or missed 323 identification of postoperative complications can lead to failure to rescue and death, more 324 severe sequalae, and increased costs [21, 43]; these events, whilst rare, have the potential 325 to undermine the benefits of telemedicine, particularly for higher-risk patients and operations 326 [44].

327

328 Two different standaridsed tools for identification of SSI using telemedicine (Centre for 329 Disease Control Criteria and Public Health England Post-Discharge Questionnaire) were 330 identified in the systematic review, but neither have been formally adapted or validate for 331 use in telemedicine. A universal outcome reporter 'Bluebelle' Wound Healing Questionnaire 332 has demonstrated promise as tool for remote detection of SSI, demonstrating excellent 333 discrimination and reliability [45, 46]; however, this has only undergone evaluation in a single 334 language in one country, and cultural and linguistic adaptation and validation to support 335 international application [47]. No included studies used videography to help identify SSI; this 336 may prove a useful adjunct to future development in this area.

337

SSI has been identified as a key priority to improve the health of patients undergoing surgery
worldwide, particularly in low resource settings [48, 49]. Lessons from use of telemedicine
for wound assessment may be generalisable to other common complications of surgery, but
bespoke tools may be required for each to ensure accurate identification of different events.
Quality-assured digital methods for remote assessment will also have high value for use in
pragmatic international trials, where delivery can be made more efficient, and more benefit
for more patients can be realised at a lower time and resource cost [50, 51].

345

346 This study has several limitations. First, we infer that the 'gold standard' in-person 347 assessment represents the true SSI rate. We are unable to assert from our data whether 348 SSI is over-reported using in-person follow-up or under-reported using telemedicine where a 349 difference is observed. Second, we assume that the differences in reported SSI rates are 350 unrelated to differences in patient characteristics after risk-adjustment. Whilst we used multi-351 level models to adjust for several confounders, there is a risk of residual selection bias. 352 Third, the quality of studies included in meta-analysis was low. We excluded studies that 353 reported SSI when telemedicine was used for a clearly different patient populations (e.g., 354 different subgroups of patients, responders versus non-responders, different geographical

355 areas), with no comparator group, or a comparator group at a different time point (e.g., in-356 hospital versus 30-day remote assessment). However, remaining studies demonstrated 357 some 'selection' of patients for telemedicine follow-up, no studies were randomised, and all 358 were at moderate or severe risk of bias. Fourth, we do not have paired within-patient 359 measures of SSI in-hospital and post-discharge at 30-days, and we are therefore unable to 360 fully account for changes in patient selection to a particular follow-up modality as a result of 361 inpatient infection. This may have exaggerated the difference between telephone and in-362 person follow-up, however our analysis of postoperative mortality did not indicate a serious 363 risk of reverse causation. Fifth, as the patients with 'inpatient only' follow-up had no post-364 discharge wound assessment they were effectively 'lost to follow-up' for the purposes of the 365 primary 30-day analysis. As we do not know the intended follow-up method (i.e., whether 366 telemedicine or in-person follow-up was planned, but only inpatient data were collected) we 367 are unable to fully explore the impact of attrition bias on the primary comparison. Sixth, there 368 is a further risk of reverse causation in linking patients with inpatient only assessment and a 369 lower observed SSI rate (i.e., those without features of SSI postoperatively may be less 370 likely to re-interact with clinical services). As such, this group were excluded from 371 multivariable analyses, and we recommend caution in interpretation. Seventh, we were 372 unable to differentiate here between different methods of remote wound assessment (i.e., 373 telephone versus video), although from ongoing work across our network it is likely that a 374 majority of assessment would have been telephone-based [47]. Eight, the cohort study used 375 a pragmatic observation methodology and did not standardise training or delivery of 376 telemedicine. This should therefore be interpreted as the real-world effectiveness of 377 telemedicine, rather than the potential efficacy of telemedicine in an optimised system [52]. 378 Finally, we have only included one, common postoperative complication in our synthesis. 379 These data set the scene for a broad research agenda to identify and validate tools for 380 remote digital assessment across diverse patient groups and operation types. The rapid 381 upscaling of telemedicine during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic highlights this as an urgent 382 research priority for the global surgical community.

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**Figure 1.** Surgical site infection rates by method of follow-up across high-, middle- and low-income

510 settings.







Figure 2. Directed Acyclic Graph displaying casual model between method of follow-up and SSI test positive ('observed SSI')

**Figure 3.** Forest plot of factors associated with reporting of post-discharge surgical site infection after abdominal surgery. A lower odds ratio conveys a lower adjusted odds of reporting a surgical site infection (i.e., assumed to be under-detection of the true SSI rate) WHO = World Health Organisation. ASA = American Society of Anaesthesiology. HDI = United Nations' Human Development Index. OR = odds ratio with 95% confidence interval.

Surgical site infection: OR	(95% CI, p-value)			
fu_method	In-person review	-	<b>i</b>	
	Telemedicine review	0.73 (0.64-0.84, p<0.001)		
HDI tertile	High		<b>—</b>	
	Middle	1.10 (0.79-1.52, p=0.579)		
<b>A</b> = =	Low	1.64 (1.15-2.34, p=0.006)		
Age	2-20		, <b>P</b>	
	21-40	1.13(0.94-1.39, p=0.109) 1.18(0.95, 1.46, p=0.144)		
	61-80	1.10(0.35-1.40, p=0.144) 1 12 (0.88-1 44, p=0.362)		
	81-100	$1.12(0.00^{-1.44}, p=0.002)$ 1.15(0.79-1.67, p=0.469)		-
Gender	Male			
	Female	1.09 (0.96-1.23, p=0.196)	·+	
ASA	I (normal/healthy)			
II	(mild systemic disease)	1.53 (1.31-1.79, p<0.001)	· · · •	
III (se	evere systemic disease)	1.86 (1.51-2.28, p<0.001)		<b>_</b>
IV (severe systemic disease	e, constant threat to life)	1.89 (1.30-2.76, p=0.001)		• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
V (not expected to surviv	e without the operation)	2.45(1.37-4.37, p=0.002)		• •
Smoker	Unknown Never Smeked	0.99 (0.69-1.43, p=0.961)		
SITIOKEI	Current smoker	1.07 (0.90 1.28 p - 0.416)		
	Ex-smoker	1 33 (1 09-1 62 n=0.004)		
	Unknown	0.97(0.77-1.22, p=0.796)		
Pathology	Malignancy			
	Other abdominal	0.96 (0.79-1.17, p=0.677)		
	Infection	2.20 (1.55-3.13, p<0.001)	-	
	Appendicitis	0.96 (0.75-1.23, p=0.761)		
	Gallstone disease	0.84 (0.67-1.04, p=0.115)		
University	Congenital	1.38 (0.69-2.74, p=0.358)	·	
Urgency				
	Semi-elective	1.09(0.82 - 1.46, p = 0.555)		
Operative approach	Open	1.05 (0.69-1.25, p=0.591)		
Operative approach	Minimally invasive	0.43(0.37-0.51  p-0.001)		
Intraoperative contamination	Clean-contaminated	0.40 (0.07 0.01, p<0.001) -		
	Contaminated	2.48 (2.13-2.89, p<0.001)	<b>—</b>	<b>-</b>
	Dirty	2.38 (1.97-2.87, p<0.001)		·
Surgical safety checklist used	Nó	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
-	Yes	0.88 (0.75-1.03, p=0.116)	► <b></b>	
	Unknown	0.82 (0.46-1.48, p=0.514)		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
			1	2 3 4

Odds ratio (95% CI, log scale)

Figure 4. PRISMA flowchart of studies included in meta-analysis.



# **PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram**

Identification

Screening

Eligibility

Included



different time point

# Figure 5. Forest plot of rates of SSI reported by telemedicine and in-person follow-up on meta-analysis

Telemee	dicine	In-p	erson				
Events	Total	Events	Total	Odds Ratio	OR	95%-CI	Weight
34	309	32	254	<u> </u>	0.86	[0.51: 1.43]	21.9%
9	112	4	29		0.55	[0.16; 1.92]	6.3%
34	536	24	156		0.37	[0.21; 0.65]	20.2%
8	105	11	105		0.70	[0.27; 1.83]	9.9%
766	5964	826	5261		0.79	[0.71; 0.88]	41.6%
	7026		5805		0.67	[0.47; 0.94]	100.0%
Heterogeneity: $I^2 = 45\%$ , $\tau^2 = 0.0703$ , $p = 0.12$							
				0.2 0.5 1 2	5		
				Telemedicine In-person			
	<b>Telemed</b> <b>Events</b> 34 9 34 8 766 03, <i>p</i> = 0.	<b>Telemedicine</b> <b>Events Total</b> 34 309 9 112 34 536 8 105 766 5964 <b>7026</b> 03, <i>p</i> = 0.12	Telemedicine         In-p           Events         Total         Events           34         309         32           9         112         4           34         536         24           8         105         11           766         5964         826           7026         03, $p = 0.12$	TelemedicineIn-personEventsTotalEventsTotal343093225491124293453624156810511105766596482652617026580503, $p = 0.12$	Telemedicine       In-person         Events       Total       Events       Total       Odds Ratio $34$ $309$ $32$ $254$ $$	Telemedicine         In-person           Events         Total         Events         Total         Odds Ratio         OR $34$ $309$ $32$ $254$ 0.86         0.55 $9$ $112$ $4$ $29$ 0.86         0.55 $34$ $536$ $24$ $156$ 0.37         0.70 $34$ $536$ $24$ $156$ 0.70         0.70 $766$ $5964$ $826$ $5261$ 0.79         0.79 $7026$ $5805$ $0.2$ $0.5$ $1$ $2$ $5$ $0.3$ , $p = 0.12$ $0.2$ $0.5$ $1$ $2$ $5$	TelemedicineIn-person EventsOdds RatioOR95%-Cl $34$ $309$ $32$ $254$ $0.86$ $[0.51; 1.43]$ $9$ $112$ $4$ $29$ $0.55$ $[0.16; 1.92]$ $34$ $536$ $24$ $156$ $0.37$ $[0.21; 0.65]$ $8$ $105$ $11$ $105$ $0.70$ $[0.27; 1.83]$ $766$ $5964$ $826$ $5261$ $0.79$ $[0.71; 0.88]$ $03, p = 0.12$ $0.2$ $0.5$ $1$ $2$ $5$

Odds ratios displayed describes a comparison of the odds of patients having an SSI reported with telemedicine versus in-person follow-up (i.e., a reduced odds ratio conveys a lower rate of SSI reported with one method in comparison to the other, and vice versa).

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