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A Comparative Analysis of Best Practices in Telemedicine Regulation across Asia and Their Applicability to Bangladesh

Samia Hassan^{*}

Abstract

Telemedicine has emerged as an essential component of contemporary healthcare by enabling remote diagnosis, consultation, treatment, and follow-up through digital technologies. Its rapid expansion, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted the need for effective legal and regulatory frameworks that ensure patient safety while supporting technological innovation. This article comparatively examines telemedicine regulation in Singapore, India, Malaysia, and South Korea to identify regulatory best practices applicable to Bangladesh. Adopting a qualitative doctrinal methodology complemented by comparative legal analysis, the study reviews legislation, government policies, professional guidelines, judicial decisions, and reports published by international organisations. Existing scholarship indicates that although telemedicine significantly improves healthcare accessibility, particularly in resource-constrained settings, Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive legal framework governing digital healthcare. The comparative analysis reveals several common regulatory principles across the selected jurisdictions, including clear licensing requirements, robust data protection, standardised informed consent, effective regulation of electronic prescriptions, professional accountability, and institutional oversight. While Bangladesh has expanded telemedicine services through policy initiatives and professional guidelines, significant legal gaps remain regarding patient privacy, professional liability, cybersecurity, regulatory enforcement, and electronic health records. The article argues that Bangladesh should adopt a

^{*}Lecturer, Department of Law, North Bengal International University, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

comprehensive and context-sensitive telemedicine law that incorporates regional best practices while reflecting domestic healthcare priorities and institutional capacity. Strengthening the legal framework would enhance public confidence, improve healthcare accessibility, and support the sustainable development of digital health services.

Keywords: Telemedicine; Digital Health; Health Law; Healthcare Regulation; Comparative Law; Bangladesh; Asia.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies has transformed healthcare delivery worldwide, with telemedicine emerging as one of the most significant innovations in modern healthcare. By enabling healthcare professionals to provide diagnosis, consultation, treatment, and follow-up care remotely, telemedicine reduces geographical barriers and improves access to medical services, particularly for populations living in remote and underserved areas. Its adoption accelerated significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic when restrictions on physical movement compelled healthcare systems to rely heavily on virtual consultations to ensure continuity of care (WHO, 2022; Keesara et al., 2020).

The increasing integration of telemedicine into healthcare systems has also generated complex legal and regulatory challenges. Unlike conventional healthcare, telemedicine involves the electronic transmission of sensitive health information, remote clinical decision-making, digital prescriptions, and, in some cases, cross-border healthcare services. Consequently, effective regulation must address issues relating to professional licensing, informed consent, patient privacy, cybersecurity, professional liability, electronic health records, and regulatory oversight (Kruse et al., 2017; Shachar et al., 2020).

Across Asia, countries have responded differently to these challenges. Singapore has developed an integrated, risk-based regulatory framework that incorporates telemedicine within its broader healthcare governance system. India introduced comprehensive Telemedicine Practice Guidelines in 2020, while Malaysia enacted dedicated telemedicine legislation and South Korea has combined regulatory oversight with substantial investment in digital health infrastructure. Although these jurisdictions adopt different approaches, they share common regulatory principles aimed at balancing patient protection with technological innovation.

Bangladesh has experienced considerable growth in telemedicine over the past decade, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Government agencies, private hospitals, non-governmental organisations, and digital health platforms increasingly rely on telemedicine to improve healthcare accessibility, especially in rural communities. Despite these developments, telemedicine continues to operate within a fragmented legal framework consisting primarily of professional guidelines and general health and information technology laws. Important legal issues that includes patient confidentiality, data protection, professional liability, electronic prescriptions, and regulatory enforcement remain insufficiently addressed, creating uncertainty for both healthcare providers and patients.

This article comparatively analyses telemedicine regulation in Singapore, India, Malaysia, and South Korea to identify best regulatory practices that may strengthen telemedicine governance in Bangladesh. It seeks to answer three research questions: (i) what regulatory approaches have been adopted by selected Asian jurisdictions; (ii) which regulatory practices most effectively ensure safe, accessible, and accountable telemedicine services; and (iii) how these practices may be adapted to the legal and institutional context of Bangladesh. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on digital health governance and proposes practical legal reforms for Bangladesh.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative doctrinal legal research methodology combined with comparative legal analysis. The doctrinal approach facilitates a critical examination of legislation, regulatory frameworks, professional guidelines, judicial decisions, and policy documents governing telemedicine, while the comparative analysis evaluates regulatory practices across Singapore, India, Malaysia, South Korea, and Bangladesh. These jurisdictions were selected because they represent different levels of regulatory development and healthcare infrastructure, offering valuable comparative insights for a developing country such as Bangladesh.

The study primarily relies on secondary sources, including national legislation, government policies, official regulatory guidelines, reports of the World Health Organization (WHO), peer-reviewed journal articles, and other scholarly publications. Existing literature consistently recognises telemedicine as an important mechanism for

expanding healthcare access but identifies recurring legal concerns relating to data privacy, professional licensing, informed consent, cybersecurity, and medical liability (Kruse et al., 2017; WHO, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). While previous studies have examined telemedicine from technological and healthcare perspectives, comparatively fewer have undertaken a systematic legal comparison of Asian regulatory frameworks with specific reference to Bangladesh. This study addresses that gap by identifying transferable regulatory principles rather than merely describing foreign legal systems.

The comparative analysis is organised around six thematic dimensions: (i) professional licensing and registration; (ii) patient consent; (iii) privacy and data protection; (iv) electronic prescriptions; (v) professional liability and accountability; and (vi) regulatory oversight. These themes provide a structured basis for evaluating the strengths and limitations of each jurisdiction and assessing the feasibility of adapting their regulatory approaches to Bangladesh. Although the study is confined to documentary analysis and does not include empirical interviews, the doctrinal-comparative approach is appropriate for identifying evidence-based legal reforms capable of strengthening Bangladesh's telemedicine governance.

3. Telemedicine Regulation in Bangladesh

Telemedicine has become an increasingly important component of Bangladesh's healthcare system, particularly in addressing disparities in healthcare accessibility between urban and rural areas. Persistent shortages of specialist physicians, overcrowded public hospitals, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure have encouraged both public and private stakeholders to adopt digital healthcare solutions. Improved internet connectivity, widespread mobile phone use, and growing digital literacy have further facilitated the expansion of telemedicine services, enabling patients in remote areas to obtain medical consultations without travelling long distances (Nessa et al., 2010; Hoque et al., 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated this transformation. During lockdowns, telemedicine became an indispensable mechanism for maintaining healthcare services while minimising physical contact and reducing the risk of infection. Government institutions, private hospitals, non-governmental organisations, and digital health platforms rapidly expanded teleconsultation services through telephone hotlines, mobile applications, and video conferencing (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

Although the pandemic demonstrated telemedicine's potential to strengthen healthcare delivery, it also exposed substantial legal and institutional shortcomings, particularly regarding patient privacy, professional accountability, informed consent, and electronic prescriptions.

Unlike several Asian jurisdictions, Bangladesh has not enacted comprehensive legislation specifically governing telemedicine. Instead, digital healthcare is regulated through a combination of professional guidelines and general healthcare and information technology laws. The principal regulatory instrument is the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) Telemedicine Guidelines 2020, which recognise telemedicine as a legitimate mode of medical practice and require registered physicians to maintain professional standards equivalent to conventional face-to-face consultations (Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council [BMDC], 2020).

The BMDC Guidelines provide general direction on physician identification, documentation, patient confidentiality, ethical conduct, and clinical judgment. However, they function primarily as professional guidance rather than legally enforceable rules. Consequently, important legal issues—including licensing of telemedicine platforms, cross-border consultations, dispute resolution, professional liability, and regulatory enforcement—remain inadequately addressed. The absence of statutory authority also limits the enforceability of the Guidelines and creates uncertainty for healthcare providers regarding their legal obligations.

Bangladesh's broader legal framework provides only indirect support for telemedicine governance. Existing legislation concerning healthcare administration, information technology, and digital governance was not enacted specifically for telemedicine and therefore offers limited guidance on issues such as electronic health records, ownership of medical data, cybersecurity obligations, or the sharing of patient information. As a result, digital healthcare operates within a fragmented regulatory environment that lacks coherence and institutional coordination.

One of the most significant legal concerns relates to patient privacy and data protection. Telemedicine depends on the electronic collection, storage, and transmission of highly sensitive medical information. While medical confidentiality is recognised as a professional obligation, Bangladesh lacks a dedicated legal framework governing

health data protection. Consequently, there are no comprehensive statutory standards regulating the collection, processing, retention, or disclosure of patients' electronic medical records. This legal uncertainty increases the risk of unauthorised disclosure, cyberattacks, and misuse of personal health information, potentially undermining public confidence in digital healthcare (Kruse et al., 2017).

Another important challenge concerns informed consent. In conventional healthcare, informed consent focuses primarily on medical treatment. Telemedicine, however, introduces additional considerations, including technological limitations, communication failures, cybersecurity risks, and circumstances in which remote consultation may be clinically inappropriate. Although the BMDC Guidelines recognise the importance of consent, they provide limited procedural guidance regarding the form, scope, and documentation of informed consent in virtual consultations. The absence of standardised procedures may create legal uncertainty in cases involving professional negligence or patient complaints (Shachar et al., 2020).

Professional liability also remains inadequately regulated. Telemedicine inevitably limits physicians' ability to conduct physical examinations, increasing the possibility of diagnostic uncertainty. Bangladesh has yet to establish statutory standards defining the duty of care applicable to remote consultations or identifying circumstances in which physicians should refuse teleconsultation and require physical examination. Without clear legal standards, determining negligence in telemedicine-related disputes becomes more difficult for courts, regulatory authorities, and healthcare professionals alike.

The regulation of electronic prescriptions presents a further challenge. Digital prescriptions have become a routine feature of telemedicine services, yet Bangladesh has not established nationally recognised standards governing their authentication, verification, storage, or monitoring. The absence of a secure legal framework may increase the risks of prescription fraud, medication errors, and inappropriate prescribing practices. Standardised electronic prescribing systems would therefore strengthen patient safety while enhancing regulatory oversight.

Institutional capacity represents another significant weakness. Effective telemedicine governance requires a competent regulatory authority capable of licensing providers, monitoring compliance, investigating complaints, and enforcing professional standards. At present, responsibility for digital healthcare is dispersed among multiple

institutions, including the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Directorate General of Health Services, and the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council. This fragmented institutional arrangement may result in overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent enforcement, and limited regulatory coordination.

The rapid growth of telemedicine demonstrates that Bangladesh's existing regulatory framework is no longer adequate to address the legal complexities of digital healthcare. A comprehensive telemedicine statute is therefore necessary to define the rights and obligations of healthcare professionals, patients, digital platform providers, and regulatory authorities. Such legislation should establish clear standards regarding professional licensing, patient consent, privacy protection, cybersecurity, electronic health records, electronic prescriptions, professional liability, and dispute resolution.

Legislative reform, however, should not occur in isolation. Comparative experience indicates that effective telemedicine governance also depends upon institutional strengthening, investment in digital infrastructure, professional training, and public awareness. A coordinated regulatory framework integrating these elements would provide greater legal certainty, improve patient protection, and support the sustainable expansion of telemedicine within Bangladesh's healthcare system.

4. Comparative Analysis of Telemedicine Regulation Across Selected Asian Jurisdictions

The regulation of telemedicine across Asia reflects diverse legal traditions, healthcare systems, and technological capacities. Nevertheless, Singapore, India, Malaysia, and South Korea share a common objective of facilitating digital healthcare while ensuring patient safety and professional accountability. Their regulatory frameworks demonstrate that effective telemedicine governance depends not on a single legislative model but on a coherent combination of legal certainty, institutional oversight, and technological readiness (Sharma et al., 2023). Examining these jurisdictions reveals several regulatory principles that remain underdeveloped in Bangladesh.

4.1 Professional Licensing and Regulatory Oversight

A defining feature of the selected jurisdictions is the existence of clear regulatory oversight governing healthcare professionals engaged in

telemedicine. Singapore integrates telemedicine within its broader healthcare regulatory framework under the Healthcare Services Act, requiring providers to satisfy licensing standards comparable to those applicable to conventional healthcare institutions (Ministry of Health Singapore, 2022). Similarly, India's Telemedicine Practice Guidelines 2020 restrict telemedicine practice to registered medical practitioners and clearly prescribe their professional responsibilities throughout remote consultations (Ministry of Health, Government of India, 2020).

Malaysia adopts a statutory approach through the Telemedicine Act 1997, which formally recognises telemedicine practice and establishes legal responsibilities for healthcare providers (Telemedicine Act 1997). South Korea, while encouraging technological innovation, also maintains strong governmental supervision through integrated healthcare regulation and digital health governance.

By contrast, Bangladesh primarily relies upon the BMDC Telemedicine Guidelines 2020, which provide ethical and professional guidance but lack the force of legislation. Consequently, uncertainties remain regarding licensing requirements for digital health platforms, regulatory enforcement, and institutional accountability. Comparative experience therefore demonstrates that statutory regulation provides greater legal certainty than professional guidelines alone.

4.2 Patient Consent and Professional Responsibility

All four jurisdictions recognise informed consent as a cornerstone of telemedicine regulation. Unlike conventional medical consultations, telemedicine requires patients to understand not only the proposed treatment but also the technological limitations of remote healthcare, possible communication failures, confidentiality risks, and circumstances requiring physical examination (Shachar et al., 2020).

India's guidelines expressly require physicians to verify patient identity, obtain consent, maintain consultation records, and determine whether telemedicine is clinically appropriate before treatment begins. Singapore and Malaysia similarly require healthcare providers to disclose the limitations of telemedicine while ensuring that patients retain the option of conventional medical consultation.

Another common principle is that technological innovation does not diminish professional accountability. Physicians remain legally responsible for exercising reasonable professional care irrespective of whether services are delivered physically or electronically. South Korea

further reinforces this principle by recognising that digital technologies and artificial intelligence may support but cannot replace professional medical judgment (Topol, 2019).

Bangladesh's regulatory framework recognises informed consent as an ethical obligation but provides limited procedural guidance regarding its documentation and scope. Likewise, no statutory standard defines the professional duty of care applicable to telemedicine consultations. These omissions increase legal uncertainty for both patients and healthcare professionals.

4.3 Data Privacy and Electronic Health Information

The protection of electronic health information constitutes another common feature of successful telemedicine regulation. Singapore and South Korea have developed integrated digital health systems supported by strong cybersecurity measures, secure electronic medical records, and institutional mechanisms for protecting patient confidentiality. Malaysia likewise imposes statutory obligations concerning confidentiality and professional ethics, while India's regulatory framework emphasises the secure handling of patient information throughout telemedicine consultations (WHO, 2022).

These jurisdictions recognise that public confidence in telemedicine depends upon effective protection of sensitive medical information. Consequently, legal regulation extends beyond professional ethics to include cybersecurity standards, institutional responsibilities, and secure electronic record management.

Bangladesh presently lacks a comprehensive legal framework governing health data protection. Existing laws relating to digital governance were not enacted specifically for telemedicine and therefore provide limited guidance on the collection, storage, processing, and sharing of electronic medical records. As telemedicine expands, strengthening statutory protection of health information will become increasingly essential.

4.4 Electronic Prescriptions and Digital Healthcare Administration

Electronic prescribing has become a routine component of telemedicine across the selected jurisdictions. India's Telemedicine Practice Guidelines categorise medicines according to their suitability for remote prescribing, thereby reducing inappropriate prescribing and improving patient safety. Singapore and South Korea integrate

electronic prescriptions with broader digital health systems, facilitating continuity of care while improving regulatory oversight.

Bangladesh has witnessed increasing reliance on digital prescriptions following remote consultations; however, nationally recognised standards governing authentication, verification, storage, and monitoring remain absent. Establishing a secure electronic prescription framework would improve healthcare quality while reducing medication errors and prescription fraud.

4.5 Lessons for Bangladesh

Despite differences in legislative design, several common regulatory principles emerge from the comparative analysis. First, all four jurisdictions regulate telemedicine through clear legal instruments rather than relying exclusively on professional guidance. Secondly, patient consent extends beyond ordinary medical consent to include technological limitations and privacy considerations. Thirdly, effective telemedicine depends upon robust protection of electronic health information supported by cybersecurity measures. Fourthly, professional accountability remains unchanged irrespective of the mode of healthcare delivery. Finally, successful implementation requires specialised institutional oversight capable of monitoring compliance, responding to complaints, and adapting regulation to technological developments.

Compared with these jurisdictions, Bangladesh has made commendable progress in expanding telemedicine services but continues to operate within a fragmented regulatory environment. The absence of comprehensive legislation governing licensing, professional liability, electronic prescriptions, data protection, and institutional enforcement limits both legal certainty and public confidence. Rather than replicating any single foreign model, Bangladesh should adopt a context-sensitive regulatory framework that incorporates these shared principles while accommodating domestic healthcare realities and institutional capacity.

5. Best Practices and Their Applicability to Bangladesh

The comparative analysis demonstrates that successful telemedicine regulation depends not on adopting a single legislative model but on establishing a coherent legal framework that balances technological innovation with patient protection. Although Singapore, India, Malaysia, and South Korea differ in their regulatory approaches,

several common principles emerge that are directly relevant to Bangladesh. These include comprehensive legislation, robust protection of patient data, standardised informed consent procedures, clear professional liability rules, secure electronic prescribing, and effective institutional oversight. Rather than replicating foreign models, Bangladesh should adapt these principles to its own legal, institutional, and socio-economic context.

The foremost priority should be the enactment of a comprehensive Telemedicine Act. At present, telemedicine in Bangladesh operates primarily under the BMDC Telemedicine Guidelines 2020, which provide professional guidance but lack statutory enforceability (BMDC, 2020). A dedicated statute would provide legal certainty by clearly defining telemedicine, identifying the rights and responsibilities of healthcare professionals, patients, digital platform operators, and regulators, and establishing enforceable standards for licensing, compliance, and dispute resolution. Such legislation would also reduce regulatory fragmentation by harmonising digital healthcare with existing health and information technology laws.

Protection of patient privacy and health data should constitute another central component of future reform. Comparative experience demonstrates that public confidence in telemedicine depends upon effective safeguards governing the collection, storage, processing, and disclosure of electronic health information (WHO, 2022). Bangladesh should therefore introduce statutory provisions specifically regulating electronic medical records, cybersecurity obligations, patient access to health information, and institutional responsibilities following data breaches. Establishing minimum cybersecurity standards would enhance trust while reducing risks associated with unauthorised disclosure and cybercrime.

The study further indicates that standardised informed consent procedures are essential for telemedicine. Unlike conventional consultations, remote healthcare involves technological limitations that may affect diagnosis, confidentiality, and continuity of care (Shachar et al., 2020). Legislation should therefore require healthcare providers to explain the nature of telemedicine services, potential technological risks, limitations of remote diagnosis, confidentiality protections, and circumstances requiring physical examination before obtaining patient consent. Standardised documentation would strengthen patient autonomy while reducing uncertainty in negligence claims.

A further priority concerns professional liability. Comparative jurisdictions consistently maintain that physicians owe the same duty of professional care regardless of whether treatment is delivered physically or remotely. Bangladesh should similarly establish statutory standards identifying circumstances in which telemedicine is clinically appropriate and situations requiring referral for in-person consultation. Clear legal standards would provide greater certainty for courts, regulators, healthcare professionals, and patients while strengthening professional accountability.

The comparative analysis also highlights the importance of electronic prescriptions and integrated digital health systems. Secure electronic prescribing improves continuity of care, reduces medication errors, and facilitates regulatory monitoring. Bangladesh should therefore establish nationally recognised standards governing authentication, verification, retention, and monitoring of electronic prescriptions while integrating them with electronic health records. Such reforms would strengthen healthcare quality and reduce opportunities for prescription fraud.

Legal reform, however, cannot succeed without effective institutional capacity. Successful jurisdictions complement legislation with specialised regulatory oversight capable of licensing providers, monitoring compliance, investigating complaints, and responding to technological developments. Bangladesh should strengthen coordination among the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Directorate General of Health Services, and the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council while considering the establishment of a specialised digital health regulatory unit responsible for telemedicine governance. Continuous professional training and public awareness initiatives should accompany these reforms to improve regulatory compliance and increase public confidence in digital healthcare.

Finally, the comparative study demonstrates that telemedicine regulation must remain adaptable. Emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, cross-border telemedicine, algorithm-assisted clinical decision-making, and evolving cybersecurity threats require legal frameworks capable of responding to rapid technological change. Future legislation should therefore incorporate periodic regulatory review mechanisms that enable policymakers to revise standards in response to new technologies and healthcare practices. A flexible regulatory framework will ensure that legal protections evolve alongside technological innovation rather than lag behind it.

Accordingly, Bangladesh should pursue a phased reform strategy combining comprehensive legislation, institutional strengthening, digital infrastructure development, and professional capacity building. Such an approach would not only improve legal certainty but also promote equitable access to healthcare, encourage responsible innovation, and strengthen public confidence in telemedicine as an integral component of the national healthcare system.

6. Conclusion

Telemedicine has become an indispensable component of modern healthcare by expanding access to medical services, improving continuity of care, and reducing geographical inequalities. The experiences of Singapore, India, Malaysia, and South Korea demonstrate that sustainable telemedicine depends upon clear legal standards governing professional licensing, patient consent, data protection, electronic prescriptions, institutional oversight, and professional accountability. Although these jurisdictions differ in their regulatory models, they collectively illustrate that effective digital healthcare requires a balanced approach that safeguards patient rights while encouraging technological innovation.

Bangladesh has made notable progress in expanding telemedicine services, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the existing legal framework remains fragmented and largely dependent on professional guidelines rather than comprehensive legislation. Important legal issues, including health data protection, cybersecurity, professional liability, electronic health records, regulatory enforcement, and institutional coordination continue to lack sufficient statutory clarity. These shortcomings create uncertainty for healthcare providers and may undermine public confidence in digital healthcare.

Drawing on comparative Asian experience, this study argues that Bangladesh should adopt a dedicated telemedicine law supported by strengthened institutional oversight, secure digital infrastructure, and clear regulatory standards. Such reform should be tailored to Bangladesh's legal traditions, healthcare priorities, and institutional capacity rather than replicate foreign models. A comprehensive yet flexible regulatory framework would facilitate responsible technological innovation while ensuring patient safety, accountability, and equitable access to healthcare.

As digital health technologies continue to evolve, telemedicine should no longer be regarded as a temporary response to public health

emergencies but as a permanent component of healthcare governance. Developing an adaptive legal framework capable of responding to future technological and regulatory challenges will therefore be essential for strengthening Bangladesh's healthcare system and achieving sustainable digital health development.

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