Best Practices in Telemedicine: The Definitive Guide

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Overview and History of Telemedicine

Telemedicine allows health care professionals to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients at a distance using telecommunications technology. The approach has been through a striking evolution in the last decade and it is becoming an increasingly important part of the American healthcare infrastructure.

History

What we recognize as telemedicine today started in the 1950’s when a few hospital systems and university medical centers started to try to find ways to share information and images via telephone. In one of the first successes, two health centers in Pennsylvania were able to transmit radiologic images over the phone.

In the early days, telemedicine was used mostly to connect doctors working with a patient in one location to specialists somewhere else. This was of great benefit to rural or hard to reach populations where specialists aren’t readily available. Throughout the next several decades, the equipment necessary to conduct remote visits remained expensive and complex, so the use of the approach, while growing, was limited.

The rise of the internet age brought with it profound changes for the practice of telemedicine. The proliferation of smart devices, capable of high-quality video transmission, opened up the possibility of delivering remote healthcare to patients in their homes, workplaces or assisted living facilities as an alternative to in-person visits for both primary and specialty care.

Telemedicine vs Telehealth

Although the terms telemedicine and telehealth are often used interchangeably, there is a distinction between the two.

The term telehealth includes a broad range of technologies and services to provide patient care and improve the healthcare delivery system as a whole. Telehealth is different from telemedicine because it refers to a broader scope of remote healthcare services than telemedicine. While telemedicine refers specifically to remote clinical services, telehealth can refer to remote non-clinical services, such as provider training, administrative meetings, and continuing medical education, in addition to clinical services. According to the World Health Organization, telehealth includes, “Surveillance, health promotion and public health functions.”

Telemedicine involves the use of electronic communications and software to provide clinical services to patients without an in-person visit. Telemedicine technology is frequently used for follow-up visits, management of chronic conditions, medication management, specialist consultation and a host of other clinical services that can be provided remotely via secure video and audio connections.

Benefits

Using telemedicine as an alternative to in-person visits has a host of benefits for patients and providers alike.

Patients enjoy:
- Less time away from work
- No travel expenses or time
- Less interference with child or elder care responsibilities
- Privacy
- No exposure to other potentially contagious patients

Providers enjoy:
- Increased revenue
- Improved office efficiency
- An answer to the competitive threat of retail health clinics and on-line only providers
- Better patient follow through and improved health outcomes
- Fewer missed appointments and cancellations
- Private payer reimbursement
How Telemedicine is Used

There are few limitations to how telemedicine can be applied. Here are a few examples of how it is being used today.

Follow-up visits
Using health software for routine follow-up visits is not only more efficient for providers and patients, but it also increases the likelihood of follow-up, reducing missed appointments and improving patient outcomes.

Remote chronic disease management
The increasing rate of chronic disease is a major challenge for our health system. It is a prime candidate for the use of telemedicine software because it makes it easier and less expensive for patients to maintain control over their health.

School based telehealth
When children become ill at school, they might visit a school nurse or be picked up by their parents and taken to an urgent care center. Some innovative districts have teamed up with doctors to conduct remote visits from the school. The provider can assess the urgency of the case and provide instructions or reassurance to parents.

Assisted living center support
Telemedicine software has already proven to be useful in keeping residence of assisted living facilities out of the hospital. Problems often occur at night or on weekends, making hospitalization the only option even for less urgent problems. With telemedicine, on-call doctors can conduct a remote visit to determine if hospitalization is necessary.

Remote post-hospitalization care
One telehealth program for patients with congestive heart failure reduced 30-day hospital readmissions by 73 percent and six-month readmissions by 50 percent.

Preventative care support
Weight loss and smoking cessation are the keys to reducing heart disease and a host of other conditions. Telemedicine can be a valuable tool in connecting providers with patients to make sure they get the support they need to be successful.

Reimbursement

The amount providers are reimbursed for telemedicine will vary depending on a state’s legislation. Some states specifically mandate that private payers reimburse the same amount for telemedicine as if the service was provided in-person. However, most states with reimbursement mandates leave this determination up to the payers. We have found the majority of private payers still reimburse at levels equivalent to in-person visits.

Privacy and Security

Because patient data will be transmitted when telemedicine is used, it is subject to HIPAA regulations. Consumer video services like Skype and Facetime do not meet this standard. In order to maintain compliance, providers must choose technology solutions that use data encryption to protect patient data.

Telemedicine FAQs

How common is telemedicine?
Telemedicine is an important and quickly growing component of healthcare delivery in the United States. There are currently about 200 telemedicine networks, with 3,500 service sites in the U.S. In 2011 alone the Veterans Health Administration delivered over 300,000 remote consultations using telemedicine. More than half of all U.S. hospitals now use some form of telemedicine.

Is telemedicine safe?
Yes. When used under the right conditions and for appropriate cases, telemedicine has been shown to be as safe and effective as in-person care. Of course, not every condition is conducive to treatment via video visits, so providers must use good judgement when leveraging this channel for healthcare delivery.

Does Medicare or Medicaid pay for telemedicine?
For Medicare patients, national telehealth policy sets many restrictions on patient location, services provided over telemedicine and facilities at which patients receive these services. However, the Medicare Chronic Care Management Program is a national policy that set no such restrictions on practicing telemedicine.

Medicaid reimbursement varies from state to state, resulting in a patchwork of different policies and reimbursement requirements.

How difficult is telemedicine technology to use?
In order to be effective, telemedicine technologies must be easy to use for both patients and providers. The best solutions are easy for medical offices to set up and deploy and as easy for patients as the mobile device applications they use every day.
About Telemedicine

What is Telemedicine?
Telemedicine refers to the practice of using telecommunications technology to evaluate, diagnose and care for patients at a distance. Although the approach has been around for decades in limited fashion, it is quickly becoming an important and mainstream channel of healthcare delivery in the United States. Telemedicine is not a separate medical specialty. Rather, it is a method of providing clinical care. Included in telemedicine are patient consultations conducted through audio and video conferencing, remote monitoring of vital signs, nurse advice lines, transmission of images, and test results.

Telemedicine and Telehealth
Although the terms telemedicine and telehealth are often used interchangeably, technically telemedicine is a subset of telehealth. Telehealth includes non-clinical activities such as medical education, administrative meetings, and provider training. Both telehealth and telemedicine are part of an even larger range of technologies known as Healthcare Information Technology (HIT), which also includes patient management systems and digital medical records.

Healthcare Services Provided via Telemedicine
A wide variety of clinical services are provided using telemedicine technologies.

Primary and Follow Up Care
In many cases, a remote visit using high definition video and audio conferencing can replace an in-person visit to the doctor's office. The patient and provider connect using an application designed for the purpose. The patient may participate using a personal computer or smart mobile device. In this case, the patient can be anywhere that offers sufficient privacy.

Urgent Care
Both stand alone urgent care clinics and primary physician's offices are leveraging telemedicine to provide urgent care services. Many urgent, but non-life threatening conditions can effectively be diagnosed and treated remotely, keeping patients out of crowded emergency rooms and clinics.

Remote Patient Monitoring
Certain conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, can best be managed with real-time information about patient vital signs and activities. Telemedicine technology can be used to transmit and store this type of data.

Psychiatric Services and Counseling
Telemedicine is ideally suited for psychiatric services, cognitive behavioural therapy, and lifestyle coaching, including weight management and smoking cessation.

Specialist Consultations
Telemedicine can also be used to leverage the expertise of specialists who are not physically present. The patient may be in the office of their primary physician when a video visit is conducted. Alternatively, the primary physician may use a telemedicine approach known as store-and-forward to provide relevant information to the specialist for evaluation.

School Based Healthcare
Schools have found that telemedicine is an effective way to get students necessary medical attention with minimal interruption to their school day.

Assisted Living Support
Care teams at assisted living centers and skilled nursing facilities can receive the support of remote providers via video, making it possible to get patients the care they need without the complexity of transporta tion.

Online Only Medical Services
A growing number of companies provide online only access to physicians and nurse practitioners. Patients can simply access a website and receive care for a limited number of conditions on-demand.

The Increasing Popularity of Telemedicine
There are a few factors that have converged to make widespread adoption of telemedicine possible and necessary.

The ubiquity of high-speed internet access and mobile devices: Most people now have access to the technology necessary for telehealth. Not only do people already have computers and smart devices that can access the internet, they are also used to using telecommunications technology in other contexts.

The Affordable Care Act: The ACA has made it possible for approximately 16 million more people to become insured. In order to service them, the healthcare system must become more efficient. Telemedicine is one way of caring for more patients with the same resources.

The aging of the population: By 2050 the United States is expected to have 83.7 million people over age 65. Older patients generally require more care than their younger counterparts. Providing efficient and cost effective care to this portion of the population is a major challenge facing the entire healthcare system. Telehealth has a large role to play in meeting it.

Evolving laws and payer policies: Many states have adopted laws that require private payers to cover visits conducted via telemedicine. Insurance companies recognize the efficiency and cost effectiveness of telemedicine and are increasingly providing coverage on par with in-person visits.
The Evolution of Telemedicine

The idea of jumping on a mobile video app to consult your doctor about a sore throat or recurring headache may seem like a completely modern thing, but it may surprise you to learn how long telecommunications technologies have been used for the delivery of healthcare. The approach has definitely gained traction and become mainstream in just the last few years, but it has been around since the first half of the 20th century.

Early Examples of Telemedicine

The first known example of a medical record transfer occurred in Pennsylvania in 1940 when radiology images were sent 24 miles between two towns over telephone lines. Today, we think nothing of sending data from place to place, but at the time the ability to get the expertise of a physician in another location was a significant breakthrough. Building on this idea, a Canadian doctor engineered a teleradiology system for use in the Montreal area.

Another breakthrough occurred when clinicians at the University of Nebraska pioneered the use of video for healthcare purposes in 1959. They set up two-way television transmission to send information to medical students across campus. In 1964 they used the technology to perform video consultations with patients and doctors at a state hospital.

Healthcare Access for Rural Communities

Telemedicine turned out to be an ideal solution in rural areas with limited access to healthcare. One notable project in the 1960’s was the result of a partnership between NASA and the Indian Health Services. It was called Space Technology Applied to Rural Papago Advanced Health Care (STARPAHC). X-ray photographs, electrocardiographs, and other medical information was sent to the Public Health Service hospital using microwave technology and used to treat both Native Americans on the Papago Reservation and astronauts in space. The success of the STARPAHC program led others to invest in the advancement of telemedicine technology and formed the basis for the solutions we use today.

Beyond the Medical Office

Beginning early in the 1970’s healthcare providers started deploying technology that let a physician and patient in one location, consult with a specialist in another using video conferencing equipment. This equipment was expensive and difficult to set up. It also required specialized training to use. So while this approach did help people get access to specialized care, it did not eliminate the need to visit the doctor’s office.

The advent of the internet and the dawning of the mobile age have changed all that. Now there are easy to use applications for PCs and mobile devices that allow patients to connect with their doctor from anywhere. This makes it possible for patients to receive primary, urgent, and specialty care without the need for an in-person visit. Online-only healthcare options provide care on-demand 24×7. Wearable technologies represent another opportunity for remote patient monitoring, allowing physicians to evaluate a patient’s vital signs in real time.

What’s Next?

The healthcare system in the United States is being stressed by several factors including the aging population and the Affordable Care Act, which expanded access to insurance to millions of Americans. Telemedicine will be an important part of the solution as it makes it possible to treat patients more efficiently and less expensively. What today may be a novel approach will soon become commonplace.

Software companies, healthcare organizations and academics are investing billions of dollars into looking for more ways to leverage technology to improve healthcare experiences and outcomes. Telemedicine will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the next generation.
Types of Telemedicine

Telemedicine refers to the delivery of clinical services at a distance. The practice of telemedicine largely breaks down into three types of solutions, store-and-forward, remote patient monitoring, and real-time encounters.

Store-and-Forward Telemedicine

Store-and-forward telemedicine is also called “asynchronous telemedicine.” It is a method by which healthcare providers share patient medical information like lab reports, imaging studies, videos, and other records with a physician, radiologist, or specialist at another location. It isn’t unlike email, but it is done using a solution that has built-in, sophisticated security features to ensure patient confidentiality.

Store-and-forward telemedicine is an efficient way for patients, primary care providers, and specialists to collaborate because they can all review the information when it is convenient for them. The approach gives patients access to a care team that can be comprised of providers in different locations, even across long distances and in different time zones. Store-and-forward is particularly popular for diagnoses and treatment with certain specialties including dermatology, ophthalmology, and radiology.

Remote Patient Monitoring

Remote patient monitoring, or “telemonitoring” is a method that allows healthcare professionals to track a patient’s vital signs and activities at a distance. This type of monitoring is often used for the management of high-risk patients, like those with heart conditions and people who have recently been released from the hospital. Remote monitoring is also extremely useful for the treatment of a number of chronic conditions. It can be used by diabetics, for example, to track their glucose levels and send the data to their doctor. Elderly patients at home or in assisted living facilities can be conveniently and inexpensively monitored.

Real-time telemedicine

When you think of telemedicine, it is likely real-time video visits that comes to mind. During a real-time telemedicine encounter, patients and providers use video conferencing software to hear and see each other. While the other types of telemedicine are used to enhance traditional in-person visits, real-time telemedicine can be used in lieu of a trip to the doctor’s office in certain situations. It is popular for primary care, urgent care, follow-up visits, and the management of medications and chronic illness.

It is important to note that the consumer video communication applications that we use to connect with friends and co-workers, like Facetime and Skype, are not appropriate for telemedicine. Telehealth encounters should be conducted using technology that has been designed to protect patient privacy and meet the strict patient protections required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Each type of telemedicine gives providers another way to deliver effective, efficient care to patients. They expand access for patients and provide a more convenient way to get the care they need.

Telemedicine Technologies

In order to meet the needs of our growing and aging population, the healthcare system in the United States must find more cost effective and efficient ways of serving the population. Telemedicine is one approach that allows providers to care for more people more quickly, expands access to more patients, and reduces the costs associated with each encounter. The telemedicine technologies that make this possible are evolving quickly and new innovations make this method of healthcare more attractive to patients and providers all of the time.

Telehealth Technologies

Although the words telehealth and telemedicine are often used interchangeably, there is a distinction. Telemedicine involves the clinical care of specific patients and an exchange of protected information. Therefore, it requires a special level of security. Some forms of telehealth, on the other hand, do not transmit patient specific medical information, so they don't need to be as secure. Here is a look at a few telehealth technologies:

Medical Information Websites

There are a host of websites, like WebMD and Mayo Clinic, that offer information on a wide range of healthcare topics. You can learn more about a particular condition, assess your risk factors, research potential treatments and more.

Mobile Apps

Health tracking mobile applications are almost ubiquitous these days. They let you measure your activity level, keep a record of your heart rate, track your sleep, and document your diet. These solutions help you better manage your own health and help you collect information that you can later share with your doctor.

Text Alerts and Notifications

Another way that telehealth is used to keep people engaged in their healthcare is text alerts and notifications. These types of applications let people sign up to get a text when they have a doctor’s appointment, need to refill a prescription, take a medication, update a vaccination, or many other types of preventative care.
Telemedicine Technologies

As we mentioned before, telemedicine technologies are a subset of telehealth that must meet the strict requirements of the Healthcare Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) for protecting confidential patient information. The most commonly used telemedicine technologies are:

Live Video and Audio Conferencing
This is what most people think of when they hear the word telemedicine. A purpose-built, secure application is used to connect patients and doctors no matter where they are. A patient can visit her doctor from home, for example, or a provider can consult with a specialist who is hundreds of miles away. Because of the need for security, consumer grade video conferencing applications like Skype and FaceTime are not appropriate for telemedicine, but the best telemedicine applications are as easy to use as these familiar apps.

Secure Email
The type of telemedicine known as store-and-forward is achieved through the use of secure email. Providers send records, images, test results, and other information back and forth as part of their effort to diagnose and treat patients.

Remote Patient Monitoring Equipment
Special telemedicine equipment has been designed to support remote patient monitoring. This is an approach that lets providers gather important information about patients over any length of time without the need for an in-person visit. Physicians can track things like heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, activity level, blood sugar levels, and other key signs of health. This is a particularly valuable tool when treating people with chronic conditions, those who have recently been hospitalized, and the elderly.

Telehealth and telemedicine technologies were once a novel invention, but today they are fast becoming an integral part of the healthcare landscape. They will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of patients, providers and the healthcare system as a whole.

Telemedicine FAQs

Although telemedicine has been around since NASA started using it to provide care to astronauts in the 1960's, it has only recently become a mainstream method for healthcare delivery. It remains unfamiliar to many patients and providers alike. If you have questions about telemedicine, you are not alone.

What is telemedicine?
Telemedicine is the practice of providing clinical care to patients at a distance using telecommunications technology. In other words, it is a method of treating patients using the internet and telephone. This can take the form of real-time video visits, secure email, or remotely monitoring a patient's vital signs.

Are telemedicine and telehealth the same thing?
The terms telemedicine and telehealth are often used as if they were the same thing, but technically telemedicine is a subset of telehealth. Telehealth also includes non-clinical uses of telecommunications technology such as self monitoring, provider and patient education, and medical records management.

Does a patient have to meet with a provider in person before a visit can be conducted via video?
This is determined on a state-by-state basis. For example in California and many other states it is not necessary for the doctor/patient relationship to be established in-person. However, a prior in-person visit is a requirement in Texas.

Is telemedicine technology difficult to use?
Of course, this depends on the specific application, but in general, telemedicine software is designed to be as easy to use as other familiar modern applications. Patients and providers with a basic familiarity with online apps should be able to quickly figure out how to use a telehealth application.

Will insurance pay for video visits?
In many cases, yes. Many insurers voluntarily pay for telemedicine visits and 30 states have laws requiring them to do so. The laws vary, so it makes sense to learn more about the rules in the state where you live or practice.

Is telemedicine private and secure?
Yes, but only when it is conducted using an encrypted platform that was designed for the purpose. Consumer apps like Facetime and Skype are not secure enough for video visits.

What about Medicare and Medicaid?

Medicare: Medicare does cover telemedicine in certain circumstances and with a number of limitations. Some telehealth services including remote radiology, pathology and some cardiology are covered as physician services. Video visits are covered by beneficiaries living in rural areas, but these visits must be conducted at a specific originating site.

Medicaid: Most state Medicaid plans cover some kinds of telehealth services, but each one has a different set of rules and requirements. We recommend having a look at the state-specific information available on www.atawiki.org and the 50 State Telemedicine Gaps Analysis: Coverage and Reimbursement provided by the American Telemedicine Association.

Is the quality of care the same as an in-person visit?
The quality of telemedicine as a method of healthcare delivery is confirmed by decades of research and demonstrations. Telemedicine has been found to be a safe, cost-effective and convenient way to provide healthcare services.

Who benefits from telemedicine?
There are three main beneficiaries of telemedicine:

Patients: Telemedicine gives patients the opportunity to receive care without a trip to the doctor's office. They don't have to take time away from work or family responsibilities. They don't waste time traveling, or money on parking or public transportation. They don't risk exposure to other patients with communicable illnesses. And they get better health outcomes and become more engaged in their own healthcare.

Providers: Video visits reduce the time of each encounter, allowing providers to see more patients, more efficiently. This boosts revenue and minimizes overhead expenses. Telemedicine reduces no-shows and cancellations. It also helps secure patient loyalty in a competitive healthcare landscape.

The Healthcare System: Even if you never use telemedicine yourself, you will likely benefit from the practice. The efficiency of telemedicine will reduce wait-times for in-person visits, help keep people with non-urgent conditions out of the emergency room, and improve the overall health of the population.
Telemedicine Info for Healthcare Providers

How Telemedicine Benefits Healthcare Practices
Telemedicine is good for providers, patients, and the entire practice. These advantages explain the increasing popularity of the approach.

The Impact of Telemedicine
Technology has been changing the practice of medicine for decades. Digitized medical records, modern practice management systems, online payer portals, and the like all allow physicians to operate more efficiently with fewer opportunities for error. Telemedicine is another technology that is poised to make practices more profitable, improve patient outcomes, and give providers unprecedented flexibility. Conducting some visits remotely using telemedicine technology has significant upside potential for practices. Here are a few of the benefits.

Increased Revenue
Video visits are more efficient than in-person ones. This means that each provider can see more patients during the same period of time. When the service is offered to patients with insurers that will reimburse for telemedicine, practices can enjoy revenue growth without the need to add providers, office staff, or office space.

Scheduling Flexibility
Modern telemedicine technology can be used virtually anywhere, at any time. This gives practices the option to offer extended hours or even weekend operations without requiring the physical office to be staffed.

Improved Patient Health Outcomes
Patients are more likely to comply with recommendations for follow-up appointments if those recommendations can be conducted via video. Video visits are also an effective way to increase patient engagement in lifestyle coaching, medication monitoring, and the management of chronic conditions. Surveys show that patients feel as satisfied, or even more satisfied with telemedicine visits.

Improved Work/Life Balance
Telemedicine gives providers the option to work from home part of the time, or to see patients outside of traditional office hours. In fact, many providers find that telehealth technology helps them maintain a healthier work/life balance. For example, it is common for medical providers to report being reluctant to take a vacation or travel on business. Telemedicine reduces this anxiety because a video visit can be conducted from anywhere. Providers who use it can travel far from home, confident that they can still provide patient care if needed.

Protection from Competition
Today’s patients have many options besides a traditional physician’s practice for care. Retail walk in clinics and stand alone urgent care operations are convenient ways for patients to get on-demand in-person care. In addition, the number of organizations offering online video visits continues to grow. These avenues are cost effective and painless for patients. Adding telehealth to a traditional practice is one way to protect against this type of competition.

Happier Employees
In addition to the benefits of telemedicine for healthcare providers, there are advantages for office staff as well. Video visits make everyone more efficient by removing the administrative overhead of in-person visits. Office staff appreciates less waiting room crowding, and happier customers. Telemedicine also reduces their exposure to illness. And, of course, improved practice profitability benefits all employees.

Fewer No-Shows and Last Minute Cancellations
No-shows and last minute cancellations are big profit drains and time wasters for medical practices. This frustration can be mitigated with the help of telemedicine by eliminating many of the factors that cause them. Transportation issues, the need to be at work, and lack of access to child care don’t matter for a video visit. Some in-person visits can even be switched to remote ones if something comes up at the last minute that prevents the patient from making it to the office.

Reimbursement for Follow-ups
Another way that telemedicine helps revenue growth is by turning something that providers often do for free today into a revenue stream. Most payers do not reimburse for telephone only follow-up visits, like those conducted to review test results or check in on the progress of a case. However, using telemedicine technology to add a video component often makes them reimbursable.

As this list illustrates, telemedicine is good for providers, patients, and the entire practice. These advantages explain the increasing popularity of the approach and why providers, lawmakers, insurers, and customers are all on board.
Reimbursement for Telemedicine

Today, more and more healthcare practices are implementing telemedicine programs. One of the main reasons is that these programs offer the opportunity to increase profitability. Providers that offer video visits as a replacement for some in-person visits are able to see more patients each day, turn unbilled follow up calls into revenue generating encounters, and minimize the problem of no-shows and last minute cancellations. Of course, this will only impact the bottom line if you get reimbursed for these telemedicine encounters. That’s why it is essential to familiarize yourself with the complex set of laws, policies, and regulations that determine how payment for telemedicine is handled.

Telemedicine Reimbursement by Private Payers

The good news is that the popularity of telemedicine is driving legislators and insurance executives toward more progressive policies regarding telemedicine. However, for now, there is a patchwork of coverage.

State Parity Laws
Thirty states have laws that require private insurers to reimburse healthcare providers for services delivered through telemedicine. Ten more states also have pending or proposed laws to do the same. These laws generally prohibit private payers from taking into account the patient’s location when making a reimbursement decision. This allows patients to conduct video visits from their home or office.

Eligible Providers and Technologies
All states with parity laws include real-time video conferencing as an acceptable form of telemedicine. Some also cover the store-and-forward approach. For the most part, any provider that can bill for an in-person encounter is eligible to be reimbursed for a video visit. But keep in mind that each state’s medical board is tasked with determining which professionals are covered under state parity laws.

Reimbursement Amounts
States also set the reimbursement amounts. Many require that private payers reimburse the same amount for remote visits that they offer for in-person ones. Some states leave that decision up to the insurer. State laws aside, many private payers realize the efficiency of telemedicine and voluntarily reimburse at the same rate as in-person encounters even if the state does not require it.

The Exceptions
Many states with parity laws have made exceptions for certain types of insurance plans. Worker’s compensation plans and small group plans may be eligible to opt out of coverage for telemedicine.

Medicare Telehealth Reimbursement

Medicare takes two different approaches to telemedicine reimbursement. The standard approach covers most patients and is a geographically limited hub-and-spoke model. There is also a new Chronic Care Management program that allows reimbursement for some video-visits.

Geographically Limited Hub-and-Spoke
Telemedicine reimbursement under Medicare was targeted toward patients who live in rural or remote areas with limited access to specialists. For this reason, in order to be eligible for reimbursement, patients must live in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) that is outside of a metropolitan area. Medicare also requires that patients be present at what’s called an “Originating Site.” Originating sites include places like doctors offices, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, rural health clinics, and community mental health centers. If a patient is not at an approved originating site, video visits are not eligible for reimbursement. This means that remote visits from the patient’s home are not covered.

Chronic Care Management (CCM) Program
Medicare recently introduced the Chronic Care Management Program. This program compensates providers that coordinate the care of Medicare patients who have two or more chronic conditions. It is open to patients no matter where they live. Providers are reimbursed $42 per month per patient for coordinating their care. This potential revenue is in addition to other services, like office visits that the provider bills for. In order to be eligible for this reimbursement, the provider must document at least 20 minutes per month in non face-to-face care of patients. Video visits are an ideal way to provide and document the service at the same time. Under the Chronic Care Management program, the patient does not need to be at an originating site, making this an ideal service to provide while the patient is at home.

Medicaid
All state Medicaid programs cover telemedicine to some degree, but each has a different set of rules and requirements. Some have originating site requirements like Medicare, while others do away with this limitation in favor of letting patients use telehealth solutions at home. To find out how telemedicine is reimbursed by Medicaid in your state, check out this comprehensive scan of the 50 states and District of Columbia by the Center for Concerned Health Policy. Right now reimbursement for telemedicine is unfortunately complicated. There are telemedicine technologies that help you sort through it and schedule video visits for eligible patients. Change is coming, however. All signs point to a future of better telemedicine: how patients are treated and how providers are paid.
### Telemedicine for Specialists

Specialty care providers are an essential part of the healthcare system. Like their primary care counterparts, specialty providers are increasingly turning to telemedicine as a way to provide better care to patients, expand their markets, and build more efficient, profitable practices. Here is a look at how some specialists are leveraging this powerful new tool.

#### HIPAA Compliance for Telemedicine Providers

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was passed by Congress in 1996 to provide the ability to transfer and continue health insurance coverage for many American workers and their families when they change their jobs. It was also designed to reduce healthcare fraud and abuse, partially by setting industry-wide standards for health care information on electronic billing and other processes. It also requires the protection and secure handling of specific patient health information. The Privacy Rule and the Security Rule addresses this last point, which is highly relevant to telemedicine.

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<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cardiology</strong></td>
<td>Providers who treat patients with infectious diseases can use telehealth technologies to monitor symptom progression, adjust medications, and respond to unforeseen side effects. Doing this via video limits the risk of exposure for the provider and others in the office.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dermatology</strong></td>
<td>Telemedicine is ideally suited for both routine skin assessments and urgent triage needs. Today's high-definition video systems are more than adequate for remote diagnosis and treatment of many skin problems.</td>
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<td><strong>Endocrinology</strong></td>
<td>Telehealth helps providers manage patients with chronic endocrine conditions including diabetes and thyroid disease. A video visit is a great way to handle adjustments to various hormone and hypertension treatments.</td>
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<td><strong>Gastroenterology</strong></td>
<td>Gastroenterologists are often working with patients who have chronic conditions like Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and chronic hepatitis C. Telehealth is a great option for managing the medications of people with these illnesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hematology/Oncology</strong></td>
<td>Hematologists and Oncologists use telemedicine as a way to monitor patients, adjust medications and manage treatment plans for patients with cancer, sickle cell disease, iron deficiencies, and other similar conditions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Infectious Disease</strong></td>
<td>Providers who treat patients with infectious diseases can use telehealth technologies to monitor symptom progression, adjust medications, and respond to unforeseen side effects. Doing this via video limits the risk of exposure for the provider and others in the office.</td>
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<td><strong>Nephrology</strong></td>
<td>Telemedicine is a valuable tool for managing chronic care patients to slow the progression of kidney disease, working to avoid dialysis and/or transplantations. Nephrologists also use telehealth to develop at-home care plans for patients recovering from kidney replacement surgery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OB/GYN</strong></td>
<td>Obstetricians and gynecologists are able to manage a host of conditions ranging from postpartum depression to family planning using remote video. Telemedicine is especially valuable when it comes to postoperative care. Scheduling remote appointments allows doctors to provide a high level of care without placing a physical burden on the patient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pulmonology</strong></td>
<td>Patients with asthma, bronchitis, COPD and those requiring mechanical ventilation are great candidates for remote visits. Telemedicine makes it easier for them to become active and engaged in their own healthcare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urology</strong></td>
<td>Urologists are able to use remote video visits to treat patient’s chronic urinary tract disorders. They can also provide care and consulting for issues involving male reproductive organs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, telemedicine has a role to play across the spectrum of specialties. This list isn't exhaustive, but it gives one an idea of how widespread and valuable telehealth has become.
Evaluating Telemedicine Technology

Sifting through the various options and vendor claims can be confusing. There are some things that most telemedicine software platforms have in common. They generally support video and audio conferencing over the internet using the patient’s PC or mobile device. Beyond that, there are a few less common features that make sense to look for. Doing so will increase the likelihood of a successful telemedicine program for your practice.

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Covered Entities
The HIPAA Privacy and Security rules apply to certain “covered entities.” They include: healthcare service providers, medical clearinghouses, and insurers, including some employer sponsored health plans.

A business associate is an entity or a person that performs activities on behalf of a covered entity. Common examples are accountants, transcription services, attorneys, and some technology service providers. Under HIPAA, covered entities enter into contracts with business associates, requiring everyone who has access to protected data to treat it with the same level of care.

HIPAA and Telemedicine
The same requirements for patient privacy and confidentiality that apply for in-person visits apply to visits conducted over video. The provider has the identical responsibility to protect patient information. The storage of electronic files, video, and images needs to be approached with the same caution as one would take with physical documents. Consumer grade services, like Skype and Facetime, do not support HIPAA compliant video conferencing because they are not encrypted. Therefore, they should never be used for any purpose that requires the use of Protected Health Information.

Telemedicine Technology and HIPAA
In terms of telemedicine, providers looking to remain compliant with the law should look for the following features in any telemedicine technology that they consider:
• Fully encrypted data transmission
• Peer-to-peer secure network connections
• No storage of video
In addition, the technology partner should be willing to enter into a business associate agreement.

Addressing Patient’s Privacy Concerns
Patients have every right to be concerned about privacy and ask how their information will be protected during a remote clinical encounter. Providers should be prepared to educate patients about the steps that they are taking, with their technology provider, to secure their confidential information. It is important to let patients know that you’ve chosen technology designed for this purpose and that you take your obligations under HIPAA very seriously.

While it is absolutely necessary to keep HIPAA in mind when setting up a telehealth program, it is possible to embrace this powerful innovation without any risk to your patient’s confidential information.

Evaluating Telemedicine Technology

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Automated Reimbursement Verification
Telemedicine laws and payer practices vary greatly. If you want to be sure that you are paid for every video encounter, be sure to look for a software solution that has built-in reimbursement validation. The vendor maintains a database of payer information and state laws and checks the eligibility of each patient for reimbursement before the video visit is confirmed.

EHR Integration
Look for a telemedicine system that can communicate with your EHR or practice management solution, eliminating double data entry and making your staff more efficient. With a good integration, you can seamlessly schedule appointments and send patient information securely back and forth between the systems.

Patient and Provider Support
The telemedicine software should be easy to use, but that doesn’t mean there won’t be questions from time to time. Look for a vendor that will directly support you and your staff, along with your patients.

Scheduling
It is smart to think a lot about how video visits will be scheduled within your practice. Some software solutions allow for patients to schedule video visits online, while others keep control over scheduling in the hands of your staff by offering provider scheduling.

Custom Branding
If giving your patients a consistent experience and keeping your brand on the top of their minds is important to you, consider a telemedicine solution that lets you tailor the look of the application to include your logo and brand identity.

If you take each of these considerations into account, you should be able to find a telemedicine solution that will meet the needs of your practice and your patients alike.
Best Practices for Starting a Telemedicine Program

Medical practices of all sizes and types are turning to telemedicine as a way to generate more revenue, keep costs down, maintain customer loyalty, and provide the type of service that patients increasingly prefer. The telemedicine technologies on the market today make it possible to do all of this with only a small capital investment and easy options for deployment. There are a few things you can do to help make your telehealth program successful while avoiding some common mistakes. Here are some best practices.

Have Clear Goals
It is very helpful to sit down and think about the goals for your telemedicine program right at the outset. You want to define clear goals with objective measurements. You might consider how you want your telemedicine program to impact things like revenue, customer satisfaction, wait times, no-shows and cancellations, staff efficiency, patient retention, new patients, and any other measurements that are important for your practice.

Involve your Staff
Telemedicine will have an impact on several functions within the practice, so it is a good idea to get a number of people involved in the roll-out of your program. Consider assembling a task-force that includes providers who will be using telemedicine, people who will be scheduling appointments, any available technical resources, and people from other business functions that might be able to assist. If people are engaged early and have the opportunity to help shape the program, they will feel more invested in its success.

Learn About Reimbursement Rules and Regulations in Your State
State laws and payer policies about telemedicine reimbursement vary widely. Most are becoming more progressive and embracing telehealth as an important tool for meeting the healthcare needs of the public. To that end, 30 states have what are known as “parity” laws, requiring reimbursement for remote video visits. Unfortunately, however, there is not a consistent approach, so it makes sense to make yourself familiar with the regulations where you practice.

Find the Right Technology Partner
There are a variety of telemedicine technologies available. Any solution you consider should be:

- Easy for patients and staff to use
- Secure and HIPAA compliant
- Equipped with a method of verifying patient eligibility for reimbursement
- Integrated with your EHR solution

Decide How Telemedicine Will Be Utilized in Your Practice
There is no universal telemedicine utilization strategy. You can tailor an approach that meets the unique needs of your practice. It may make sense to block off certain times during the week for remote visits, or you may decide to make video visits available during times that the office is traditionally closed. One approach to increasing utilization and revenue is conducting the follow up phone calls that you already do by video. Telephone calls are typically not reimbursable, whereas video encounters may very well be.

Market the Service
It is important to make sure that your patients know that video visits are an option for them. You may want to post signs in the office, send an email, or make mentioning it a part of every in-person encounter. Even if patients don't immediately embrace the approach, knowing that it is an option may help keep them loyal to the practice in the face of increasing competition from retail health clinics and online only providers.

Ask for Feedback
Whenever you introduce something new to your staff and patients, it is important to gather their feedback. Think about the best way for you to get the insight of both groups and integrate their best ideas into your program.

Measure Success Against Your Goals
Once you are seeing patients via telemedicine, remember to check in with your goals from time to time. You may need to tweak your program or your goals after you get started. It is also important to recognize and reward your team when goals are met or exceeded.

Telemedicine has the potential to change your practice for the better in a number of ways, so it is smart to introduce it thoughtfully. These best practices will help you along the path to a healthy telemedicine program.
Advantages of Telemedicine for Patients

If you like the idea of seeing your doctor over a video conference on your laptop or smartphone, you are not alone. According to research by Software Advice, 75% of survey respondents are interested in trying telemedicine. Telemedicine has been used in a limited way for decades, but it is only now becoming more mainstream. This is because so many people have access to high-speed internet connections and the devices necessary to perform a video visit. The approach is popular with patients due to its many advantages. Here are a few:

No transportation time or costs
When you see your doctor on your mobile device or computer, you can save money on gas, parking, and public transportation. Even better, you don’t waste time traveling or risk running into a traffic jam that makes you late for your appointment, or worse, late getting back to work.

No need to take time off of work
Speaking of work, video visits largely remove the need to take time off. You can simply schedule your visit during a break, or before or after work. You can be anywhere that offers sufficient privacy. You can comply with your doctor’s follow-up instructions and maintain your health without missing a day of work or wasting your precious paid time off.

Eliminate child or elder care issues
Many of us have the responsibility for caring for children or older adults. Finding alternative care so that you can see the doctor can be difficult and expensive. Bringing them along can be stressful or impractical. Fortunately, telemedicine solves this challenge by allowing you to see your doctor while upholding your family responsibilities.

On-demand options
More and more physician’s practices are offering telemedicine these days, so there’s a good chance that you’ll be able to see your regular doctor via video. If you can’t, but still need remote access to care, there are a number of online-only, on-demand options on the market today. They can’t treat every condition, but can tackle a wide variety of problems. Some insurance companies pay for this type of care.

Access to Specialists
Some patients who need the care of a specialist must drive long distances and invest a lot of time for each visit. Telemedicine makes it possible for you and your primary care physician to leverage the expertise of specialists who are not nearby. When it comes to serious health issues, you want to consult with the best physician, not necessarily the closest.

Less Chance of Catching a New Illness
Where can you be sure to find a lot of sick people? At the doctor’s office of course. While everyone does their best to prevent one patient from catching something from another, it is always possible, especially in crowded waiting rooms. By staying home, you get the care you need while avoiding the risk of exposure and the chance that you’ll pass your illness on to someone else.

Less Time in the Waiting Room
If you choose a video visit via telemedicine technology, you’ll eliminate all that time spent looking at old magazines in a doctor’s office. Even if you don’t use telemedicine, choosing a practice that offers it will reduce your wait time by letting other patients be seen from home.

Better Health
When you are able to see your doctor as often as you need to, without the challenges of getting into the office, you can practice better management of your medication, lifestyle, and any chronic conditions you might have.

Given this list, it is not surprising that people are seeking out healthcare providers that offer the convenience and cost effectiveness of telehealth. It is poised to have a major positive impact on the entire healthcare system, and ready to make life a little bit easier for you.
Getting Comfortable with Video Visits

Trying out a new way to see your doctor can be a bit intimidating. Your health is of utmost importance, so if you have questions about how telemedicine technology will impact your encounters and your relationship with your provider, you are not alone. Here is some information that might make you feel more confident about this new option for getting the care you need.

Quality of Care

It is important to know that not every medical situation is right for a video visit. Your provider and staff know when it is safe and effective to conduct an encounter using telemedicine. For those that are, studies have shown that there is no detectable difference in the ability of a provider to gather necessary information, make an accurate diagnosis, and develop a plan for treatment. In short, video visits result in the same desired clinical outcomes as in-person care when used appropriately. In fact, when used in certain context, telemedicine can actually improve patient outcomes. Here are a few examples:

- **Congestive Heart Failure**: Among patients with congestive heart failure, one study found that telemonitoring was “significantly associated with reductions in mortality ranging from 15% to 56% compared with patients receiving ‘usual care.’”
- **Stroke**: In a study to assess whether telestroke consultations were superior for decision-making purposes than telephone-only consultations, the former won out—with researchers determining that telemedicine-based consulting resulted in more accurate decision-making.
- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)**: A study to assess “Using Telehealth technology to deliver pulmonary rehabilitation in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patients” concluded that telehealth pulmonary rehabilitation was an effective tool for increasing access to services, and improved both quality of life and capacity to exercise in comparison with the traditional approach.

When Video Visits Can Replace In-office Visits

Video visits can be used to replace in-office visits in a number of ways. Examples include:

- **Follow-Up Exams** – Providers often recommend a follow-up visit after beginning a course of treatment. These visits are important to the ultimate resolution or management of the problem. Doing them remotely makes it easier for you to comply with the doctor’s recommendations.
- **Urgent Care** – Both traditional practices and stand alone clinics are starting to offer telemedicine as an option for urgent care needs. Conditions such as the flu, sinus infections, urinary tract infections, and more can be effectively treated without an in-office encounter.
- ** Specialty Care** – Telemedicine makes it possible for patients to get access to the best specialist for their needs, not just the closest.

Privacy and Security

You have every right to be concerned about the privacy and security of your confidential medical information. While today’s digital world offers a lot of convenience, there are risks. Fortunately, there are telemedicine solutions on the market that have been designed specifically to protect patient information and meet the strict standards of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, known as HIPAA for short.

Be sure to ask your provider if the solution they use is HIPAA compliant, and never agree to a video visit over consumer grade applications like Facetime or Skype.

Cost

We have an entire page dedicated to the details about insurance coverage for telemedicine. The short version is that many state legislators recognize the advantages of telemedicine for patients and the healthcare system as a whole. In fact, 30 states have passed laws requiring private insurance companies to reimburse providers for video visits. Many insurance companies also see the value of telehealth and pay for video visits even when they are not required to by law. Your insurance company and your provider can help you determine if your policy will cover telemedicine.

Telemedicine has been around for decades, but it is just now becoming more mainstream. For many patients, the approach is new, but it is also effective, secure, and affordable. If you want to eliminate travel expenses and cost, avoid missing work, and stay out of crowded waiting rooms full of sick people, why not give it a try? Ask your provider if they offer remote visits via telemedicine.
**Who Offers Telemedicine?**

Telemedicine has big advantages for healthcare providers and patients alike. Providers are able to see patients more efficiently and expand their markets. Patients avoid the hassle and cost of going into an office each time they need care. For a long time, technological challenges and costs kept the use of telemedicine relatively limited. But today, the widespread availability of high-speed internet connections and devices with high-definition video capabilities has made it possible for the use of telemedicine to be greatly expanded. Now providers of many types are able to offer the option of video visits.

**Primary Care Practices**

Video visits are used by primary care practices as a way to enhance the service they offer to patients. Here are a few of the common uses of telemedicine in primary care:

- **Follow-Up Visits:** Primary care practices find that offering a follow-up visit via video makes it easy for patients to comply with the provider’s instructions and ensure that the patient is improving as expected.

- **Medication Management:** Patients with chronic conditions or those who are on a medication for a long time enjoy the convenience of video visits for medication management.

- **Reviewing Test Results:** A video visit is an excellent way for a provider to discuss laboratory or radiology results without requiring the patient to trek into the office.

- **Lifestyle Coaching:** People working to lose weight or quit smoking can benefit from regular video coaching and treatment plan management.

**Mental Health Providers**

The use of telemedicine by mental health providers is sometimes called Telemental Health, Telepsychiatry, or Telebehavioral Health. One of the reasons that telemedicine for mental health services is so popular in the United States is a shortage of qualified providers. Telemedicine makes it possible for fewer providers to serve more patients efficiently. It is ideal for medication management, or for checking-in between visits.

**Specialists**

Specialty care providers have found that telemedicine is an effective way to ensure that patients get the expert care they need. The approach allows people to see the best provider for their particular condition, even if they aren’t located nearby. Specialties that commonly leverage telemedicine include:

- Cardiology
- Dermatology
- Endocrinology
- Gastroenterology
- Neurology
- Nephrology
- OB/GYN
- Oncology/Hematology
- Ophthalmology
- Pulmonology
- Urology

**Urgent Care**

Both stand alone urgent care clinics and primary care providers are using telemedicine to meet the demands of patients for immediate access to care. Clinics devoted solely to the practice of urgent care medicine incorporate telemedicine as a way to reduce costs, increase market share, and ensure patient loyalty. Primary care offices use video visits to extend office hours, making it possible for patients to fill all of their needs within the practice, rather than turning to retail or online only providers.

**Online Only Services**

There are now a number of services that offer on-demand, online access to health professionals for video visits, often 24×7. Patients simply log into a web-based or mobile application and request a visit. A licensed healthcare professional provides care for everything from cold and flu symptoms to allergies and depression. These services often offer affordable rates for people who pay out of pocket, and some visits are covered by insurance. Doctor on Demand, and Amwell are examples of this type of service.
Will My Insurance Cover Telemedicine?

Insurance coverage for telemedicine is impacted by federal and state laws as well as insurance company policies. Although some are more progressive than others, these days many state legislatures and private health insurance providers are recognizing the potential of telemedicine to reduce costs and keep patients healthier. Even the federal government is taking a new look at how telemedicine might be used more broadly under Medicare. You should check with your insurer regarding how telemedicine is covered under your particular policy, but here's a general look at the coverage landscape.

Telemedicine Reimbursement by Private Insurance Companies

Video visits are used by primary care practices as a way to enhance the service they offer to patients. Here are a few of the common uses of telemedicine in primary care:

State Laws That Require Insurers to Cover Telemedicine
Right now, twenty-six states have laws that require private insurers to reimburse healthcare providers for services delivered through telemedicine. These are often referred to as “Parity” laws. In addition, ten more states are also considering legislation to do the same. Each law is different, but they generally say that private payers can't take the patient’s location into account when deciding to cover a video visit, making it possible for covered patients to be at home or work during the encounter. This guide by the American Telemedicine Association is a great way to learn more about the laws of your state. Many states with parity laws have made exceptions for certain types of insurance plans. Worker's compensation plans and small group plans may be eligible to opt out of coverage for telemedicine.

Covered Providers and Technologies
Every state with a parity law includes real-time video visits as an acceptable form of telemedicine. Some also cover services provided by secure email, or store-and-forward telehealth. In most cases, any provider who can bill an insurance company for an in-person visit is eligible to be paid for a remote one, but this is not always the case. Some states require that a patient relationship be established with an in-person visit before the provider can bill for a video visit, but many states do not have this requirement.

Payment Amounts
Some state laws require that insurers pay the same amount for video visits done via telemedicine as they do for an in-person encounter, while others leave the decision about how much the provider will be paid up to the insurer. The good news is that even in states without these parity laws, many insurers recognize the value of telemedicine and have decided to cover video visits on their own even in states that do not require it. So even if your state does not have a law regarding telemedicine, it is still a good idea to check with your insurance company to see if your appointment is covered.

Medicare Telehealth Reimbursement

Medicare has a telemedicine coverage approach that is intentionally limited in scope. Its goal is to make sure that patients in remote and rural areas have access to a specialist that may not be available near by. Therefore, patients must live in what is known as a Health Professional Shortage Area that is outside a metropolitan area.

In addition, Medicare also requires that patients go to a designated healthcare facility in order to initiate a video visit. From there, the patient and their local provider can connect to a distant specialist using telehealth technology. Video visits from home, or anywhere that is not what's called a designated “Originating site,” are not covered under Medicare.

Medicaid

Every state Medicaid program offers some type of coverage for telemedicine, but they are all different. Some are like Medicare and require patients to be at a healthcare facility during the visit, while others allow for visits from home or work. The Center for Concerned Health Policy has a comprehensive scan of the 50 states and District of Columbia that will help you learn more about how Medicaid approaches telehealth in your state.

It is unfortunate that telemedicine coverage is so complex right now. But as more and more insurance companies and state legislatures see the benefits of telemedicine on their communities, laws and policies will change quickly to embrace telehealth.
Telemedicine Related Associations and Agencies

Telemedicine is becoming big business in the United States. According to an analysis by Grandview Research, the market for telehealth hardware, software and services is expected to reach an astounding $2.8 billion by 2022. Because of this, there are a number of associations and advocacy groups that provide information and support to people interested in how telemedicine is changing our healthcare system.

American Telemedicine Association
The American Telemedicine Association (ATA) is a pioneering international resource and advocacy group that works to promote the use of advanced remote medical technologies. ATA members want to see telemedicine integrated into the healthcare system as a way to improve quality, affordability, and equality across the world. The non-profit organization, which was established in 1993 and is headquartered in Washington, DC, is open to individuals, healthcare institutions, companies, and others interested in promoting the use of telehealth technologies.

Center for Connected Health Policy: The National Telehealth Policy Resource Center
The Center for Connected Health Policy (CCHP) is a public interest organization that develops and distributes telehealth policy solutions designed to promote improvements in health and healthcare systems. CCHP was initially focused only on California telemedicine policies. It’s Telehealth Model Statute Report, became the basis for the Telehealth Advancement Act of 2011, which allows California medical professionals to utilize telehealth and removes barriers to the practice of telemedicine. In 2012, the organization became the federally designated National Telehealth Policy Resource Center (NTRC-P) and today, has expanded its mission to include national health policy.

International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH)
The International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth is an organization determined to facilitate the “international dissemination of knowledge and experience in Telemedicine and eHealth and providing access to recognized experts in the field worldwide.” It serves as an umbrella for national telemedicine and eHealth organizations, assisting the startup of new organizations. It has close ties to the World Health Organization and International Telecommunication Union. The organization is open to councils, associated societies, corporations, and individuals.

International Council of Nurses (ICN) Telenursing Network
The ICN Telenursing Network strives to, educate, support and collaborate with nurses and nurse supporters from across the globe who have an interest in telenursing. They work to promote nursing involvement in the development and use of telehealth technologies, with the goal of improving the timeliness, quality and access of a broad range of healthcare services.

The Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT)
The Office for the Advancement of Telehealth (OAT) in the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) promotes the use of telehealth technologies for health care delivery, education, and health information services. The OAT provides funds to promote and improve telehealth services in rural areas, including: the Telehealth Grant Network Program, Rural Veterans Health Access Program, and the Telehealth Resource Centers Grant Program.

Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers
Telehealth Resource Centers (TRCs) have been established to provide assistance, education and information to organizations and individuals who are actively providing or interested in providing medical care at a distance. Their charter from the Office for Advancement of Telehealth is to assist in expanding the availability of health care to underserved populations. Because they are federally funded, the assistance provided is generally free of charge.

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Telemedicine Publications and Blogs

Telemedicine is quickly becoming a standard and mainstream way of providing care for patients across the United States. Laws and insurance provider policies are changing to increase access to this convenient and cost effective channel for healthcare delivery. It’s no wonder then that so many people want to be part of the conversation about how this innovative approach to modern healthcare is impacting patients and providers. Here are some outstanding telemedicine publications and blogs.


Telemedicine and e-Health is a leading international peer-reviewed journal covering the full spectrum of advances and clinical applications of telemedicine and management of electronic health records. It places special emphasis on the outcome and impact of telemedicine on the quality, cost effectiveness, and access to healthcare.

Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare

The leading journal in its field, the Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare helps you to stay up-to-date in this fast moving and growing area of medicine. Contributions from around the world provide a unique perspective on how different countries and health systems are using new technology in healthcare. This high quality scientific work provides excellent coverage of developments in telemedicine and e-health with a focus on clinical trials of telemedicine applications.

Telemental Health Institute Blog

The Telemental Institute is a non-profit institute designed to research and develop evidence-based training materials and resources; offer free webinars to the behavioral professional community; consult agencies wishing to start-up their own telemental health programs; credential providers and provide other support services as the professional community increases health care access to more patients via digital health. Their blog covers strategic planning, reimbursement, technology choices, legal and ethical risk management and staff development/placement.

Chiron Health Blog

Chiron Health is a telemedicine software solution that makes it easy for patients and providers to replace some in-office visits with remote video visits. The Chiron Health blog is full of useful information about all aspects of telehealth including discussions on technology, best practices, reimbursement, regulations, security, and patient satisfaction.

Getting Paid Weblog by Kareo

Getting Paid, a weblog by Kareo, offers ideas, news and opinions about medical billing and practice management with the goal of making medical billing easier. They frequently cover the topic of telemedicine with a focus on provider reimbursement.

Healthcare Informatics Blog

Healthcare Informatics serves as the leading source of information for forward-thinking professionals involved in the planning, development, and implementation of important technological trends that define tomorrow’s healthcare. Telehealth is one of these trends, and their telemedicine blog covers issues from market conditions to changing laws and payer policies.

The Greenway Blog

Greenway Health is a leading provider of clinical, financial, administrative and connectivity information solutions to physician practices. Their blog covers a broad range of topics related to practice management, patient satisfaction, and all things telehealth.

CareCloud Blog

CareCloud is an online practice management solution designed to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of their practices, while connecting and collaborating directly with patients in support of better care. The CareCloud blog is all about improving connections between patients and providers, including frequent discussions about the role of telemedicine.
**Telemedicine Glossary**
To help better understand the subject of telemedicine, we’ve compiled a list of some of the most common (and least understood) terms in the field.

**API (Application Programming Interface)**
An API is software that sets the rules for two applications to send data between them. APIs are used in medical practices to connect telemedicine technology to electronic health record systems, online scheduling applications, or practice management systems. This eliminates the need for duplicate data entry and reduces potential errors.

**Audio-teleconferencing**
Audio-teleconferencing is simply a phone call between two or more parties. Visits using audio-teleconferencing without a video component are usually not covered by insurance.

**Encryption**
Encryption is a method of encoding data in an email message or on a webpage that makes it so the information can only be retrieved and decoded by the person or computer system authorized to access it. Secure telemedicine software uses encryption to protect patient privacy related to video transmissions and other data.

**HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act)**
HIPAA is United States legislation, enacted in 1996, that provides data privacy and security provisions for safeguarding medical information. HIPAA is important to telemedicine because its Privacy Rule and Security Rule govern how providers and their business associates must protect the confidential health information of patients.

**Peer-to-Peer Networking**
Peer-to-Peer Networking is a type of internet connection that hides the identities and locations of all participants. This reduces the chance of accidental or intentional unauthorized access to data. Peer-to-peer networking is used in telemedicine to protect patient confidentiality.

**Real-time Communication**
Real-time communication involves “the capture, processing, and presentation of data at the time the data is originated.” In other words, the participants interact exactly as if they were in the same room. A telephone call or live video conference involves real-time communication.

**SaaS (Software as a Service)**
SaaS is a method of delivering software in which the software resides on hardware controlled by the vendor. Users access it via a web browser or mobile application. This method of software delivery puts the onus of maintenance on the vendor, rather than the customer and reduces the time and cost it takes to get started. You may hear this referred to as cloud-based, or internet-based software.

**Store-and-Forward or Asynchronous Communication**
Store-and-Forward, also known as “Asynchronous Communication,” is a two-way communication with a time delay between when a message is sent, when it is received, and when a response is communicated. Email is a great example of store-and-forward. In telemedicine, secure email is used to send test results, or images for a specialist to review, for example.

**Telehealth**
Telehealth refers to clinical and non-clinical services provided at a distance. It includes provider training, administrative meetings, and continuing medical education and clinical services. According to the WHO, telehealth serves, “surveillance, health promotion and public health functions.”

**Telemedicine**
Telemedicine is a subset of telehealth that is related only to the provision of clinical healthcare services and education remotely, through the use of telecommunications technology. Telemedicine technology is frequently used for primary care, the management of chronic conditions, medication management, specialty care, mental health services, and other clinical care that can be provided effectively using secure video and audio connections. Telemedicine and telehealth are often used interchangeably, but there is a distinction.

**Telemonitoring**
Telemonitoring is the use of audio, video, and other telecommunications and electronic information sharing technologies and devices to monitor the condition of a patient remotely. Telemonitoring can be used to track a patient’s heart rate, activity, or blood sugar levels, for instance.
Medical professionals do not simply adopt a new way of providing clinical care because it is cost effective and convenient. It must also be proven to be safe and effective based on empirical, impartial, and convincing evidence. That's why many studies have been conducted to determine the suitability of telemedicine in a variety of applications. Here are some of the most influential reports and studies.

According to the American Telemedicine Association, “Over 40 years of research has yielded a wealth of data about the cost effectiveness and efficacy of many telemedicine applications. PubMed a bibliographic database of medical research that is maintained by the National Library of Medicine includes over 12,000 citations of published works related to telemedicine or telehealth. Over 2,000 evaluative studies related to telemedicine have been published in two journals devoted to telemedicine alone.” This report includes summaries that highlight the results from some of the studies that have evaluated the cost effectiveness, quality of care and patient acceptance of telemedicine.

This report is based on research conducted by the Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center under contract to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Researchers identified 1,494 citations about telehealth, from which 58 systematic reviews met the inclusion criteria. Among their key findings, “A large volume of research reported that telehealth interventions produce positive outcomes when used for remote patient monitoring, broadly defined, for several chronic conditions and for psychotherapy as part of behavioral health. The most consistent benefit has been reported when telehealth is used for communication and counseling or remote monitoring in chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory disease, with improvements in outcomes such as mortality, quality of life, and reductions in hospital admissions.”

[Study] Department of Veterans Affairs – Care Coordination/Home Telehealth: the systematic implementation of health informatics, home telehealth, and disease management to support the care of veteran patients with chronic conditions
Between July 2003 and December 2007, the Veterans Health Administration introduced a national home telehealth program, Care Coordination/Home Telehealth. Analysis shows the benefits of a 25% reduction in numbers of bed days of care, 19% reduction in numbers of hospital admissions, and mean satisfaction score rating of 86% after enrolment into the program. The cost is $1,600 per patient per year, substantially less than other NIC programs and nursing home care. The authors concluded that “Enterprise-wide home telehealth implementation is an appropriate and cost-effective way of managing chronic care patients in both urban and rural settings.”

[Study] HIMSS Analytics Essentials Brief: 2016 Telemedicine Study
HIMSS Analytics released the 2016 Telemedicine Study, an Essentials Brief that highlights three years’ worth of market data focused on the adoption of telemedicine technology across the U.S. hospital market. It includes information about access, current telemedicine solution adoption rates and plans to purchase, vendor market share and mindshare, and snapshot statistics for telemedicine solutions across the entire US hospital landscape.

[Study] Rand Corp – Analysis Of Teladoc Use Seems To Indicate Expanded Access To Care For Patients Without Prior Connection To A Provider
The study, conducted by the RAND Corp. and published in the journal Health Affairs, found that using telecommunication services to provide clinical care from a distance were used mostly by younger, more affluent patients who were more tech savvy. The study assessed the utilization of telemedicine services in a commercial insurance plan that offered access 24 hours a day to Teladoc, a Texas-based firm that is one of the largest telehealth providers in the country. Researchers found no increase in clinical misdiagnosis or errors in treatment among those using the service.

[Study] Use Of Telemedicine Can Reduce Hospitalizations Of Nursing Home Residents And Generate Savings For Medicare
Findings from a controlled study of eleven nursing homes provide the first indications that switching from on-call to telemedicine physician coverage during off hours could reduce hospitalizations and therefore generate cost savings to Medicare in excess of the facility's investment in the service.

[Study] Baxter – Remote Monitoring of Chronic Diseases: A Landscape Assessment of Policies in Four European Countries
This study observed a growing number of funding approaches and policies supporting remote monitoring for chronic diseases, such as chronic heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes. The study also reports a survey of healthcare payers and policymakers in these countries indicating the value of remote monitoring is perceived to be moderate to high in these chronic diseases.