

Is Telehealth the Future?

By Melissa Fischer



We live in an age of information technology. For every problem, there's a technological solution. Is healthcare on board?

Telehealth is a technological healthcare movement and it's happening now. It enhances the delivery of long-distance clinical healthcare via technology that facilitates the diagnosis, consultation, treatment, education, care management and self-management of a patient's healthcare plan.

Methods of Telehealth

Live video allows for real-time, two-way interaction between a patient or caregiver and a provider. Video visits can be a substitute for in-person visits; they are used for consultative, diagnostic and treatment services.

Stored technology is the transmission of recorded health history, such as pre-recorded videos or digital images such as x-rays, through a secure electronic communications system. A practitioner or specialist uses the information to evaluate the case and provides a diagnosis outside of real-time or live interaction. This is most beneficial in specialty care and can be used in instances where there are limited board-certified specialists in the community.

Remote patient monitoring (RPM) is a service in which a patient may wear technology that stores and transmits personal health and medical data via a secure data

processing service. This service allows a provider to continue to track healthcare data for a patient after they have been released to home or a care facility which can greatly reduce hospital readmission rates.

Mobile health (mHealth) is the application of healthcare practice and education supported by mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets. Services range from targeted text message reminders to promote healthy behavior to wide-scale alerts about disease outbreaks.

What are the benefits?

Using technology to access clinical healthcare improves the convenience, ease and speed of care. It's especially beneficial for individuals with limited access to transportation. Now, access to the Internet via a computer or smart phone allows someone to see their doctor within minutes—all without the hassle of traveling to and from the doctor's office.

Telehealth improves accessibility to specialists, providing everyone the opportunity for higher-quality



care. Providers have access to real-time data about illnesses and patients see real-time results. Although initial costs are higher for providers who invest in the technology, telehealth is a cost-effective, long-term solution for the entire healthcare network.

One of the greatest benefits of telehealth is reduced hospital readmission rates. Transitional care is greatly improved when a doctor monitors patients remotely or provides self-management videos to a patient after a hospital visit. This benefits the patient and reduces stress for their family members or caregivers.



Is Telehealth safe?

Telehealth is legally obligated to comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA is a legislative act that provides data privacy and security mandates for protecting patients' medical information. Telehealth providers use secure electronic communications systems to insure patient privacy.

The industry still faces challenges but there have been improvements. In 2015, Medicare extended beneficiary coverage to seven new telehealth services which included annual wellness visits.

At the end of the day, telehealth has the potential to be life-saving technology. Ask your doctor about telehealth options available to you.

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