

Telehealth: Advancing the Landscape of Healthcare



There is little doubt that the landscape of healthcare is changing, and as the healthcare industry continues to grow exponentially, so does the sheer volume of people who need care. As the need for healthcare professionals and clinicians increase, so does the need for healthcare technology. Advancements in healthcare, namely new technology, will have a great impact on patients and employees alike. Telehealth or virtual care solutions (VCS), applications and wearables, 3D printing, artificial intelligence (AI), genetics/genomics, and electronic medical record (EMR) analytics will save money for hospitals and save the lives of patients.

Some hospitals, clinics, and outpatient facilities are already utilizing these types of technology and are encouraging patients to use Zoom for Health, Skype, and other telecommunications options to speak with a clinician. Being able to have face-to-face interactions with a physician virtually still allows the patient to describe and share their physical symptoms, which provides for a prompt diagnosis from the comfort of the patient's home instead of a physician's office. Physicians can then inform patients if they need to come in for further testing, prescribe medication, or give them advice on what's next. This saves time and money for both patients and providers alike.

Though Zoom for Health and Skype are great options for care, telehealth will play a more critical role in care delivery as the brick-and-mortar, in-person care model becomes less common. This transformation will enable providers to better tailor their care to patients' unique needs, while increasing patient autonomy and engagement. As such, virtual mobile kiosk use or VCS is also on the rise. VCS allows patients, with or without insurance, to be seen without an appointment by utilizing kiosks that act as a physician's office. The kiosks

are strategically placed in remote areas where medical facilities may pose a challenge for patients to access.

Sirach Health & Wellness, based in Tucson, Arizona, is one such healthcare organization spearheading a major effort to place mobile kiosks throughout the state of Arizona. Patients subscribe to use the kiosks at a low cost of \$10 per month. This allows for access to a network of licensed physicians, nurses, and other clinicians who will be able to diagnose and treat patients using cardio and EKG emergency diagnostic tools, pre- and post-op services, integration into local paramedic and hospital services, EMR system, point of sales (POS) integration into pharmacy POS solutions, and ongoing patient portal support and data storage. This means patients can send their virtual care visit record(s) to their primary care physician. The kiosks are FDA-approved and are HIPAA compliant.

Additional advancements in telehealth include wearable devices and apps that can help doctors and nurses diagnose patients. For instance, some wearable devices or apps can measure heart rates and temperatures without having the patient in the office. This information can help physicians understand any inconsistencies or health challenges the patient may be experiencing beyond looking at them virtually and hearing their symptoms. The apps can also help patients understand when to call a physician and when their symptoms suggest something mild that an over-the-counter medication could remedy. These options in healthcare technology mean that sick people do not have to trek to the doctor unless it's necessary, saving clinics and patients time, money, and the ability to stop the spread of illnesses.

Many appointments that occur in a hospital or physician's office today can take place outside of the hospital. As the healthcare industry increasingly moves toward value-based care, providers must extend their line-of-sight outside of a brick-and-mortar facility's walls. For example, a low-risk follow-up appointment after a surgical procedure typically consists of mostly dialogue, which has a predictable outcome. These visits could be conducted electronically. By filling up hospitals and physician offices with visits that could occur virtually, it makes it harder for patients who need face-to-face healthcare access to receive it without having to wait for weeks to get an appointment.

Patients have choices in healthcare, and they are demanding real-time health information, personalized medicine, patient-centered, high-quality care, and convenient treatment options. Therefore, technological innovation will continue to dramatically alter the landscape of healthcare and how it is delivered, which will result in more personalized care, improved clinical outcomes and patient experiences, and overall quality of life. To embrace technological innovation, payers and providers must adapt to this changing landscape in healthcare and become educated and aware of the expanding medical technology and develop technology investment and deployment strategies to ease the burden on patients and the healthcare industry at large.