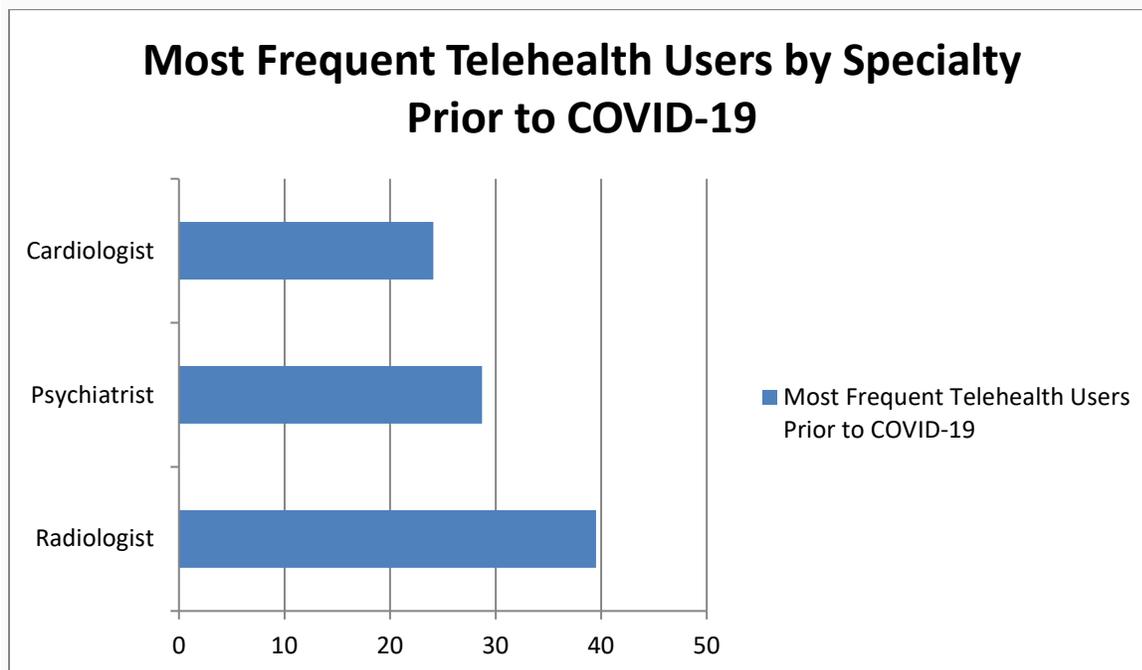# Healthcare 2.0: The Pivot to Deliver First-Line Care with Virtual Visit Technology

There is a growing priority in providing virtual visits and telehealth solutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. What you need to realize is that this emphasis on telemedicine is a permanent pivot in the healthcare industry. A pandemic is an extraordinary event, and society will eventually ease restrictions on socialization. However, the need for virtual visit technology will be a permanent fixture in the healthcare landscape, even after the fear of infectious disease has subsided.

In March of 2020, there was a 50% increase in telehealth use across specialties.

The COVID-19 crisis is not the only driving force pushing for first-line care that includes telemedicine technology. This dynamic did speed up the acceptance of telemedicine as a viable option for patients and physicians. It is also interesting to note that insurance carriers and government agencies have relaxed restrictions on this technology, making it far easier for physicians to use these tools while maintaining compliance and being able to verify payment for services.

Telemedicine was growing in use prior to the pandemic. In fact, an article published by the American Medical Association in May 2019 indicated that telehealth was growing at a rate of 53%; much faster than any other place of practice. What the AMA showcased in their article was a need for physicians' offices and healthcare organizations to adapt to offer virtual visits. Patients and practices benefit from this technology in several ways that extend beyond the current situation.

Most Frequent Telehealth Users by Specialty Prior to COVID-19

Legend: ■ Most Frequent Telehealth Users Prior to COVID-19

For many physicians, finding ways to implement telemedicine technology is a priority. But they are experiencing some uncertainty about the process and are concerned with issues of how to launch new telehealth technology efficiently. Smaller practices may be concerned about the way the technology works, whether it can be integrated with their current EHR, and how it will function with their administrative and billing cycles.

It is also no small concern that telehealth solutions, such as virtual visits, don't offer the same benefits as an in-person examination. While in office visits do offer specific benefits that cannot be recreated through telehealth, physicians are finding that video visits do offer insights to improve outcomes and efficiency as a first-line approach. Many issues can be more than adequately treated through this solution. Patients with more advanced needs can be scheduled for in-person visits when telehealth solutions will not suffice.

The technology is there to offer excellent care options through telemedicine to support and supplement your current practice procedures. It is also imperative that your practice makes the leap to adding this technology to maintain the highest level of service to your patients.

Many practices are interested in adding virtual visits to the range of services they can offer their patients. But they have questions about the best way to implement and the cost vs ROI. At PrognoCIS, we've put together comprehensive information on telehealth, to give you a robust overview of the market, the options your practice has in types of telehealth, ways to implement changes, and how to streamline the process for efficiency.

The main goal of this paper is to aid in your research into telehealth solutions. The swath of material covered can give you an overview of current uses for telehealth technology and actionable tips on how to successfully implement solutions in your organization for improved outcomes.

Telemedicine growth: what is telehealth?

New technologies in telemedicine include remote viewing and video office visits to allow physicians to "see" patients who cannot be at their physical location. However, telehealth is a larger marketplace than that. Some telehealth solutions that provide benefits to patients and their physicians include apps for phones, dietary services, and solutions that help connect patients with their physician's in-between visits to help track their progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for telehealth options to stem the spread of infectious diseases. The telehealth industry prior to this event saw great growth due to the number of patients with chronic conditions. This solution allows patients better access to care at home, in-between visits. These solutions mean improved outcomes and more advanced data to help physicians diagnose individual patients and understand chronic illnesses as a whole.

Projected Growth of US Telemedicine Market prior to Covid-19 CAGR of 18.5%
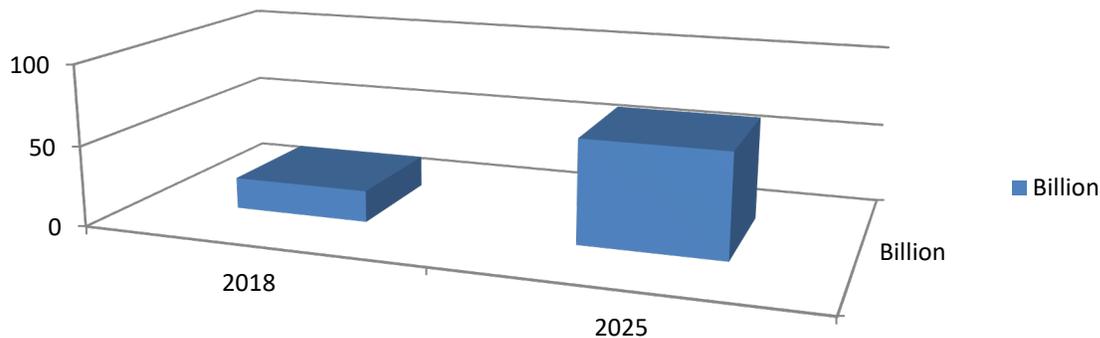
As an industry, telehealth was projected to grow 18.5% from 2019 - 2025. That growth rate will likely be much higher due to new applications that have increased in prevalence in recent months.

Telemedicine growth and its role in healthcare

In a recent Washington Post article, an infectious disease specialist talked about some of the amazing and possibly unthought-of benefits to the acceptance of telemedicine. Convenience for the patient is a highlight but there are other benefits for comfort and cost savings, as well. There are benefits for the patient and the practice/physician. There are cost and time savings involved in telemedicine, which can be a major benefit for everyone involved.

Telemedicine is being talked about a great deal right now and it is clear that most practices need to add to their telemedicine services. But you should also realize that telehealth isn't exactly new, it just wasn't commonplace in previous generations. There have been examples of physicians using phone, radio, and video technology to treat patients. More recently, most physicians have used some facets of telemedicine in recommending healthcare apps and utilizing their patient portals to help maintain communications with patients. While these scenarios don't fulfill the unique benefits involved in virtual visits, they do provide some health and wellness care for patients who have ongoing conditions.

Healthcare historically moved slowly in adopting technology, as we saw with the progression from paper records to EHR. Physicians often felt that the need to document during visits was a hindrance to their ability to engage with their patients, as well.

Most organizations today would agree that EHR has improved the process and made practices more efficient. It's also offered a major benefit for sharing records. Much like these previous technologies, physicians are looking for ways to implement virtual visit telemedicine that will streamline and improve the process, without damaging productivity or quality of care.

Some benefits of implementing virtual visits for the physician include:

- **Improves access to patients.** This has been highlighted with the recent pandemic but can be a hindrance for many patients in other situations. Virtual visit options allow physicians to see patients who might have a more difficult time physically coming into their office.
- **Convenience.** This is a benefit for both patients and physicians. Virtual visits can be conducted around the patient and physician's schedule and both parties can attend the meeting without driving to a location or otherwise disrupting their day. Catering to patient convenience is an important aspect of care in today's healthcare environment where patients routinely "shop" for providers much in the way they would research other services.
- **Increased efficiency.** A good virtual visit solution, such as PrognoCIS, makes the entire process of the examination, scheduling, and record-keeping more efficient for the practice, staff, and patient.
- **HIPAA compliant.** One worry many physicians have about any technology is compliance. A good telehealth solution will be absolutely HIPAA compliant, protecting your practice, as well as your patients.
- **Ease of billing and coding.** A previous concern about virtual visits was whether they would be covered under insurance and government programs. We will discuss current and recent legislation in more detail further on, but these visits are encouraged and easily covered and billed.

> Patient benefits from the use of telemedicine include:
>
> Convenience
>
> The ability to see their preferred physician
>
> Reassurance in at home treatment = more confidence
>
> Ability to see their physician when they cannot physically get there.

How to implement telehealth in your practice

As a recent article from CNBC discussed, there have traditionally been a few barriers for practices wanting to implement more telehealth solutions into their services. They also noted that in March of 2020 there was a 50% increase in virtual visits. That does not mean that barriers don't still exist. It simply means that many physicians and patients saw a real and pressing need to use technology for their medical visits.

You may have already implemented some form of a virtual visit to see patients in the short term. If you are reading this paper, it is likely that you're still researching solutions or better implementation practices. Without a set solution that integrates with your EHR, there may have been pain points in the process of seeing patients, recording the visit, or billing and coding.

To implement a good protocol with your telemedicine solution, you will want to assess the whole process. If you have not yet started working with virtual visits or decided on the right solution for your practice, here are some key steps to get you started:

How to implement:

1. **Assess your current protocol/research solutions.** If you have already conducted some virtual visits without a set plan or system in place, take some time to assess how well your process worked and where you think changes need to be made. You might see needs for improvements in billing or coding or record keeping. There may be other issues that you were concerned with. These should all be noted to make improvements for the future and to lend to your choice of telemedicine platforms.
2. **Choose a vendor**. The solution that will best fit your practice should include items that eliminate issues and make the process as efficient as possible for your staff. Some key things to look for in your decision making include HIPAA compliance, convenient scheduling, ability to integrate with your EHR, support, ease of training, and cost-efficiency.
3. **Retraining and marketing to patients.** One pain point that many physicians had was that patients were not excited about using virtual visit solutions. That scenario has flipped upside down and many patients today would be happy to use telehealth solutions if it were provided by the physicians they trust. Once you do implement a solution, make sure to conduct some outreach to let your patients know that this service is available to them and train them on the right scenarios for use.
4. **Assess the process regularly.** Like every aspect of your practice, you want to assess the progress regularly to detect pain points and areas for improvement. You should, of course, also note areas where the solution has improved the process so that you can judge the ROI of the implementation over the short and long-term.

Special Use Cases for Telehealth

The landscape for virtual visits and telehealth is quickly changing. To get a better view of who used virtual visits and telemedicine solutions prior to COVID-19, and AMA article from January 2019 can shed some light on the biggest adapters of last year. Cardiologists and psychiatrists were among the highest percent of specialists using telemedicine routinely. The psychiatric field sounds more conducive to virtual visits than perhaps some other specialties. Many might have been surprised by the finding that cardiologists also used this technology in greater numbers, but it makes a great deal of sense.
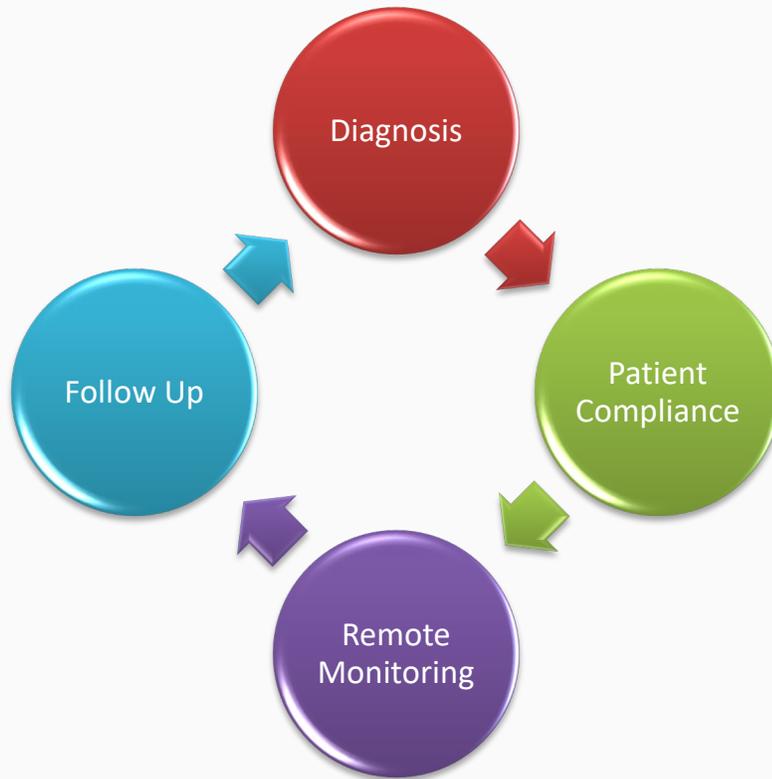
People with chronic conditions can get a great benefit from the use of telemedicine because it allows them better, more regular communication with their physician. This lets the physician monitor how well their therapy is working on a more regular basis and can encourage better patient compliance with lifestyle and medication prescriptions.

The same article found that emergency room physicians used telemedicine solutions to communicate with other healthcare professionals and specialists. This is another fantastic benefit to the technology that is rarely discussed—it allows for a less encumbered exchange of resources and information.

Use cases might also include physicians whose patients could not physically see them. In these cases, it might be a patient who got sick while traveling or one who lived in a rural location and could not travel to the physician's location for a visit. In rural locations, there can also be a lack of providers in the nearby area which may mean that patients would see their doctors less frequently because the travel time was cumbersome. Telemedicine gives people in these positions options that allow for better well care and overall health outcomes.

Rural locations are not the only areas that can benefit from the addition of telemedicine to a practice. Many people who live within travel distance find the option for virtual visits is convenient to schedule and attend. These visits might be additional checkups or due to some current illness. Parents find these visits to be amazingly beneficial to reassure them that their child's illness or health issues are within normal measurements. New parents are notorious for calling pediatricians and taking their children in more than is necessary. While there is nothing wrong with being careful, a telemedicine approach to these situations can both reassure the parent and save time and cost for the practice and patient.

As the COVID-19 cases increased and [virtual visits became more commonplace](#), a unique thing happened. Physicians who were reticent to adopt telehealth technology began seeing great benefits and really enjoying the process. Many physicians who had never used telehealth solutions believed that it could not be as thorough as in-person visits. After all, there are so many things that physicians might need to see in person and lab results are necessary for certain diagnoses.

Telehealth solutions are like any other tool available to the medical community—there is a time and place for its use. Telemedicine can be a great support and supplement for ongoing care for chronic patients. It can be an emergency use solution for physicians to get a second opinion or for healthcare professionals to help treat a patient that is too far away physically.

Recent rules and acts supporting the use of telemedicine

The American Hospital Association has long been advocating for expanded coverage of telemedicine, and the recently passed CARES act is paving the way. The AHA has maintained a position that hospitals and patients should have access to telemedicine solutions because it allows for better innovation, more efficiency, and improved outcomes.

The [CARES act](#) did implement these changes to include telemedicine coverage for Medicare patients, which is hugely important in the elderly population who was most susceptible to COVID-19. They released a [toolkit](#) to help organizations implement changes immediately to benefit patients and providers alike.

As an overview, the federal government and CMS have lifted many of the restrictions in using telehealth during the pandemic. These restrictions include, the use of various technologies, expanded coverage, and the ability to prescribe through telemedicine visits. For a fuller itemization of all of the items included in the CARES act to aid in implementation of telehealth initiatives, the [AMA's fact sheet](#) is an excellent source.

Payment and reimbursement for telemedicine

One of the barriers that physicians often cited for not moving to telemedicine was the possibility that they would have issues with reimbursement and payment for the virtual visit. Not every insurance covered this in the past, though many insurance companies are adopting coverage for this service.

Like any service, it is important that you bill and code for the treatment correctly in order to secure payment in a timely fashion and to guard against claims denials. Ideally, you should choose a solution that automates this process and helps you to integrate with your own records in a seamless way that makes the billing and coding aspect of telehealth as cost-effective as the visits.

The benefits of telemedicine post COVID-19

It is difficult to speak of a pandemic in a positive light, but the more complete acceptance of telemedicine will prove to be a positive step forward for healthcare professionals and patients, alike. For many people, change is exceptionally unnerving. This is true for physicians who have spent years developing their process for examining patients in person. It is equally true for patients who have never met with a doctor through their Smartphone.

This scenario made trying a telehealth solution unavoidable and many people were pleasantly surprised by how much they enjoyed the process. Of course, it is not only about the convenience for the patient and physician. Telehealth can help reduce costs and supplies for physicians' offices. It is a greener solution overall. Think of the number of physician visits that are simple well-checks. Consider that each of those visits meant that the patient drove a car, tools in the office needed to be sterilized, paper gowns, or other items needed to be used.

All these measures are necessary for well-care, but telehealth provides another option that can be just as beneficial for outcomes while improving cost and efficiency.

Many patients who were reticent to try this type of technology are far more comfortable with the process. They also enjoy the fact that they can see their regular physician who has their records and has been maintaining their care.

Are you ready to embrace the best solution for your telehealth service?

There is no question that your practice should embrace virtual visits and other telemedicine solutions. The growth in the industry means that many providers will be offering this service and patients will look for providers who offer it. For your patients, continuity of care is an important feature. If they do explore telehealth options, they will want to use the same doctor who they see regularly.

Telemedicine is also a cost-efficient solution for your practice, and it improves outcomes for your long-standing and chronic patients.

At PrognoCIS, we offer full support and a wide range of features for a telehealth solution that can integrate seamlessly into your existing practice. The PrognoCIS TeleMed Standalone standard and Premium is a telehealth EHR software solution that makes the whole process easy, from patient scheduling through billing and coding.

We offer a solution that scales from a single physician practice to large healthcare organizations, keeping all your key staff members on the same page. This telehealth software is intuitive and user-friendly so that patients who are less technology inclined are also comfortable with the experience.

Patient convenience is important, but behind the scenes, the PrognoCIS solution makes sure that you gather all the data necessary to make billing and payment cycles more efficient. It integrates with your current EHR protocol to allow for the perfect accompaniment to your record-keeping process for improved outcomes and better patient care.

With PrognoCIS, you will have access to all the latest information on telehealth medical billing, payment, and reimbursement so that you're always prepared to meet the current regulatory needs. It

is fully HIPAA compliant and helps you to communicate with patients and vendors in a secure and timely fashion.

If you are currently looking for a telemedicine solution that makes the process easy and enjoyable, contact us today for more information or a full demonstration.