

UNDERSTANDING TELEHEALTH: What is it & How it works



Discover. Connect. Transform.

Learn more about Henry Schein's solutions provider by calling
your local representative or visiting [HenryScheinSolutionsHub.com](https://www.HenryScheinSolutionsHub.com).



INTRODUCTION

If you work in the healthcare industry, odds are you've at least heard of telehealth. Patients are interested in it because of the convenience it brings in a society that's accustomed to having our schedules catered to. Providers are interested in it because of the opportunity to increase patient satisfaction, reach otherwise unreachable patients, and bring in more revenue. When done right, telehealth can certainly be a win/win. However, many people aren't completely clear on what telehealth is and how it works. This lack of familiarity can make experiencing the benefits of telehealth difficult.

In this eBook, we'll tell you all you need to know to gain that much needed familiarity with telehealth. We'll start with the basics of what telehealth is, including the types of telehealth and the devices utilized for it. Then we'll look at some situations in which telehealth is most useful before moving into the benefits of telehealth for both patients and providers. Finally, we'll look at how to implement telehealth in your practice, including some best practices and a step-by-step process, before concluding with how to bill for these services. This is a lot of ground to cover, so let's get started.

Discover. Connect. Transform.

Learn more about Henry Schein's solutions provider by calling
your local representative or visiting [HenryScheinSolutionsHub.com](https://www.henryschein.com/solutionshub).

What is Telehealth?

Telehealth is the use of virtual and telecommunications technology in order to deliver and facilitate services related to healthcare including patient care, education for providers and patients, and public health administration. There are a broad variety of technologies used to deliver these services, and telehealth itself is not one specific service but rather the collection of technological methods used to enhance the delivery of care and education in the healthcare industry.

There are a number of different types of telehealth, including virtual home healthcare, which is likely what most people think of when they think about telehealth. In virtual home healthcare, patients who are elderly or chronically ill are able to receive healthcare guidance while remaining in their home. Telehealth is also useful for patients in remote areas who can be reached by much needed providers, as well as allowing for more convenient continuing education that fits more easily into providers' schedules. On the clinical side of things, there are several ways to offer services with the use of telehealth, with the most popular including:

- **Live, interactive video consultations:** With this service, videoconferencing is used in order to allow a visit between a patient and provider who are both present at the same time, although not in the same location.
- **Store-and-forward consultations:** With store-and-forward, a patient is seen at a certain location, during which visit information is captured on video to be sent to a physician at another site to be evaluated at another time.
- **Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM):** With this service, patient's health data is collected at a location other

than their provider's practice and is electronically sent to their healthcare provider for review and monitoring.

- **Mobile Health (mHealth):** With mHealth, healthcare is supported by the use of health-based apps installed on smart devices such as smartphones, smartwatches, or tablets.

Each of these types of telehealth has the goal of improving patient outcomes without the need for a face-to-face encounter.

Telehealth is administered through the use of several types of devices and applications. One of the most popular devices for telehealth are telemedicine carts. These devices give providers a mobile setup in which to carry all the technology they require for performing remote patient visits, such as computers, cameras, and mobile medical devices. Providers are able to easily wheel these carts with them from room to room as they examine patients for whom they need to either record data or bring in another provider in another location to consult. In addition to telemedicine carts, there are mobile medical devices that can be used by both providers and patients in order to collect health data that will then be transmitted to a provider at another location for the purpose of monitoring a patient's health. Finally, providers often want a software application specific to telehealth, which is often cloud-based. This software allows a practice to optimize both administrative and clinical workflows by using one platform across all of the devices they're using for telehealth purposes.



When is Telehealth Most Useful?

Like most everything else in the healthcare industry, there are certain situations in which telehealth is particularly useful. The first of these situations is when performing Chronic Care Management (CCM). CCM, by definition, involves members of a practice's clinical staff providing services outside of an in-person visit for a patient dealing with at least one chronic condition. If enough of these services are provided over the course of a calendar month, the practice is able to bill and be reimbursed for these services. Telehealth enhances a practice's ability to perform CCM by adding the use of video conferencing and wearables to the typical method of patient portal communication, allowing the practice to be more hands on in their CCM activities. This not only improves the health outcomes of these chronically ill patients, but also increases the practice's revenue by enhancing what they can bill for with regards to CCM codes.

The next situation in which telehealth is most useful is a little broader. Telehealth is incredibly useful in helping providers reach patients who live in isolated areas. Too often, patients who live in rural or other underserved areas don't have access to quality physicians, especially specialists, and they also may not have the resources to be able to travel to see a provider. Telehealth reduces these burdens, as well as improving timeliness, communication, and monitoring for patients in these types of situations. Through the use of telehealth, rural hospitals can avoid transfers for specialty care

by conducting these consultations remotely. This both increases convenience and decreases cost burdens.

Finally, telehealth is particularly useful for making follow-up appointments more convenient. When follow-up appointments are conducted with the use of telehealth, patient outcomes have been shown to improve. This is likely because patients are more likely to keep their follow-up appointments when they're more convenient for them. When follow-up appointments are kept, issues can be caught earlier, meaning better care coordination, reduced hospital readmissions, and improved patient health outcomes overall.



What are the Benefits of Telehealth?

For patients

Telehealth has a number of benefits for patients, many of which center on a greater level of convenience for their care:

- **Elimination of travel lowers costs, both in time and money:** By virtually attending a doctor's visit, patients save money on transportation costs. Additionally, when getting to the appointment simply means logging in, the patient is able to take less time out of their schedule.
- **Eliminate the need to secure child care:** There may be nothing more stressful for a parent than sitting in a crowded doctor's waiting room with their child. It's boring for the child and stressful for the patient. This means the patient needs to find a sitter, which can be another source of stress. When a patient can see their provider from the comfort of their own home or wherever else is convenient, there's no stress and no need for a sitter.
- **Options to see a provider on-demand:** Too often patients will encounter a situation where they need to see a doctor, but it's just not feasible to get to the doctor's office, either because the patient's schedule prohibits it or because the doctor's schedule is too packed. With more and more practices offering telehealth services, it's more likely that patients can see their own provider via video conferencing. Even if that isn't an option, though, there are lots of other options online to allow a patient in need to see a provider at the moment they need to do so. While not all conditions can be treated this way, there are a number that can be, and this is much more convenient for a patient than trying to figure out when they can get to their doctor's office or paying for an urgent care visit.
- **Increased access to specialists:** Most people have been in the situation at least once where their primary care provider has told them that they need to be seen by a specialist, only to find out that the specialist is located a long distance away. Telehealth makes it possible for your provider to get you the best care without the burden of travel.
- **Less chance of getting sick with something else:** Obviously, doctor's offices are very careful to do everything in their power to reduce germ exposure for their patients, but the reality is that if you're in a crowded waiting room you're likely being exposed to something. By attending a visit virtually, the patient can get the care they need without being exposed to additional illness. On the flip side, this can also keep a patient who is sick from spreading their illness to others.
- **Less waiting:** Providers do their best to get to each patient in a timely manner, but we all know how busy medical practices are. Patients are regularly left waiting in the waiting room, only to then be taken to an exam room for more waiting. By using telehealth, that waiting is eliminated.





What are the Benefits of Telehealth?

For providers

Benefits to telehealth for providers typically center around work satisfaction and improvements to workflow:

- **Greater provider satisfaction:** Telehealth can make it easier to see patients, allowing providers to better manage their work/life balance, leading to greater satisfaction overall.
- **Improved clinical workflow:** Telehealth can streamline how patient complaints are captured as well as facilitate more efficient care prioritization and treatment.
- **Provide immediate access to patient data:** When telehealth is implemented effectively, providers are able to almost instantaneously access patient health data. This data can then provide the clinician with a detailed overview of the patient's health, allowing for more effective care delivery.
- **Elimination of knowledge gaps:** When providers and patients are able to connect outside of regular office visits, providers are able to know more about their patients' health status and care for them more effectively.
- **More efficient management of a greater patient load:** Providers are expected to see a larger number of patients in today's healthcare landscape. By leveraging the power of telehealth, providers can better manage their time as they work to interact with and treat such a large number of patients.
- **Increased reimbursement:** Telehealth can enable providers to see more patients and provide more services than they otherwise would have been able to, and billing for these additional virtual visits and services increases the amount of reimbursement that provider will see, thus improving the practice's bottom line.

Discover. Connect. Transform.

Learn more about Henry Schein's solutions provider by calling
your local representative or visiting [HenryScheinSolutionsHub.com](https://www.henryschein.com/solutionshub).



How Can a Practice Implement Telehealth?

There are certain considerations a practice should take when implementing a telehealth program. First of all, the practice should make sure that they start small. As with anything else, trying to do too much, too fast could be overwhelming and lead to failure. It's best to identify the areas in your practice where you could use the most help and that would be most likely to benefit from telehealth applications. Choose just one of those areas where you feel the impact would be the most significant and implement telehealth there first. Then use what you learn through that experience as you roll out telehealth to other areas of your practice.

Next, it's important to account for all related costs. While you do want to add convenience for your patients and streamline workflow for providers, ultimately a medical practice is still a business and that means that return on investment (ROI) is an important consideration. In order to be sure you'll have an acceptable ROI, you first need an accurate picture of the investment you'll need to make. Don't start anything until you're sure you know exactly what it's going to cost you.

In the same vein, make sure you're gathering all the reimbursements that you're eligible for with regard to telehealth. This starts with understanding what's allowable through your various payers for telehealth services and focusing your implementation on those services. Then make sure you're claiming for those services appropriately and that you're getting the reimbursements as you should.

It's also important to get momentum where you can, and one way to do this is to make sure that the staff members who are involved in your initial forays into

telehealth become enthusiastic champions of the program's expansion. The best way to do this is to make sure the solutions you choose are easy to learn and use. By doing this, the providers who first utilize the program will be enthusiastic about it and promote it to the rest of the staff.

The importance of marketing also can't be understated. No matter what else you do, if patients don't know about or use the telehealth program, it won't succeed. Put up signage in your waiting room, email your patients, and put notices into your patient portal to make sure your patients know that telehealth is an option.

Finally, you'll want to make sure you have a telehealth expert in your practice. This can either be a new position or someone already on your team who's particularly passionate and knowledgeable about telehealth. This person will be committed to coordinating telehealth services and making sure that your patients and providers alike understand the value of this program.

Each of these considerations must be met within the context of the step-by-step plan of implementing a telehealth program. The first step in this plan is to establish the vision for how telehealth will be conducted in your practice. This allows your organization to clearly define the objectives that you plan to achieve with telehealth as well as how you plan to achieve them. Within this step, you'll want to set specific short- and long-term goals that are measurable so that you can determine if your program is successful along the way.

Continued to next page.



The next step is to build a long term financial plan for your telehealth program. This is where you'll set goals that are specifically financial in nature. You should also make sure that you know how you'll measure your success financially.

Once your vision and finances are set, you'll want to set out to create a work environment that's both effective and convenient. Telehealth is most useful when it's available when and where it's needed. For this reason, it's important to have the tools you'll use for telehealth in a location that is conveniently located for your providers. Make sure that the technology you choose for your practice is not only effective, but also as easy to use as possible. You should also try your best to choose technology that fits in well with the rest of the exam room so as not to be disruptive.

Next you'll need to start the process of determining how you'll bring telehealth services into the standard care workflow. One of the most important considerations to make in this step is how to make telehealth services as similar as possible to the same services when delivered in office.

Planning effective training is the next step, and it's a critical one. Remember that timing of training is equally important to the actual content of the training. All telehealth training should include the following basics:

- Clinical technology
- Communication technology
- Diagnostic devices used both in office and for patients
- Workflow and protocols
- Troubleshooting and how to reach technical support

While training, try to keep scenarios as realistic as possible and allow for hands on practice when possible.

By this time you should have your telehealth staff in place.

Many practices find it's helpful to have a full-time staff member whose sole concentration is coordinating telehealth services, however depending on the level at which you're beginning your program this may or may not be necessary. You'll need to decide based on your specific practice's needs if it will take a full time employee to schedule all telehealth sessions, make sure the technology is working properly, and encourage use of the program.

Finally, before launching the program, you'll want to get your marketing going. A good rule of thumb is to make sure that you position the program to your patients by acknowledging the need telehealth will fill for them. This will make the value of telehealth obvious to your patient pool and likely encourage many early adopters.



How Do You Bill for Telehealth Services?

Like all other services provided in a medical practice, billing for telehealth services will vary slightly among the different payers you accept. For Medicare patients, the first thing you'll need to do is define your originating and distant sites. This is important because Medicare will reimburse for telehealth services performed by a provider at a distant site to a patient at an originating site as long as the originating site is located in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). Additionally, only certain originating sites in an HPSA are authorized, meaning that the patient must be in one of the following locations for the service to be billable:

- Medical practice
- Hospital, including Critical Access Hospital
- Rural Health Clinic
- Renal Dialysis Centers, provided they are hospital-based
- Community Mental Health Centers
- Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Skilled Nursing Facilities

Once you've defined the sites, the next important step is making sure that the CPT or HCPCS codes that you're using are actually eligible for reimbursement for

telehealth. Medicare has a specific list of acceptable codes that you'll want to keep nearby. In addition to the appropriate codes you'll need to make sure you're using the proper modifier, which through Medicare is the GT modifier. Finally, you'll need to bill for a facility fee if you are the site hosting the telehealth visit. And remember, Medicare reimburses for telehealth services at the same rate as comparable in-person services.

When providing telehealth services for Medicaid patients, it's important to remember that Medicaid is almost constantly changing and also differs from state to state. So your best bet with Medicaid is to just make sure that you're keeping up to date on all of the latest regulations and changes and train your billing staff to stay up to date as well and to always be prepared to research what they don't know.

Finally, there are private payers, each one with different stipulations for how telehealth services should be claimed. The best rule of thumb when dealing with private payers is to have a conversation with each of the payers you accept to determine what their telehealth policies are and then bill accordingly. It's also always wise to verify your patient's insurance before providing any service, and telehealth is no exception.



CONCLUSION

Telehealth is a popular concept in the healthcare industry because it creates a number of benefits for both patients and providers. There are a number of devices and applications that can be used across several different types of telehealth, all with the same goal — to make healthcare accessible in new locations and new ways. While a great deal of attention is necessary to adequately implement telehealth, when billed properly, it's well worth the effort.

Are you interested in getting started with telehealth in your practice? Medpod integrates proprietary telehealth software with professional medical and laboratory devices that are absolutely best-in-class in order to provide groundbreaking telediagnosics with real time active polling and transmission of patient clinical data. With the ability to choose the level of telehealth you wish to implement in your practice, medpod is the right solution for your practice, no matter where you are in your telehealth journey. Ready to get started? Henry Schein Solutions Hub has you covered. For more information on medpod, visit henryscheinsolutionshub.com or call 833-433-2482.



Discover. Connect. Transform.

Learn more about Henry Schein's solutions provider by calling your local representative or visiting HenryScheinSolutionsHub.com.

