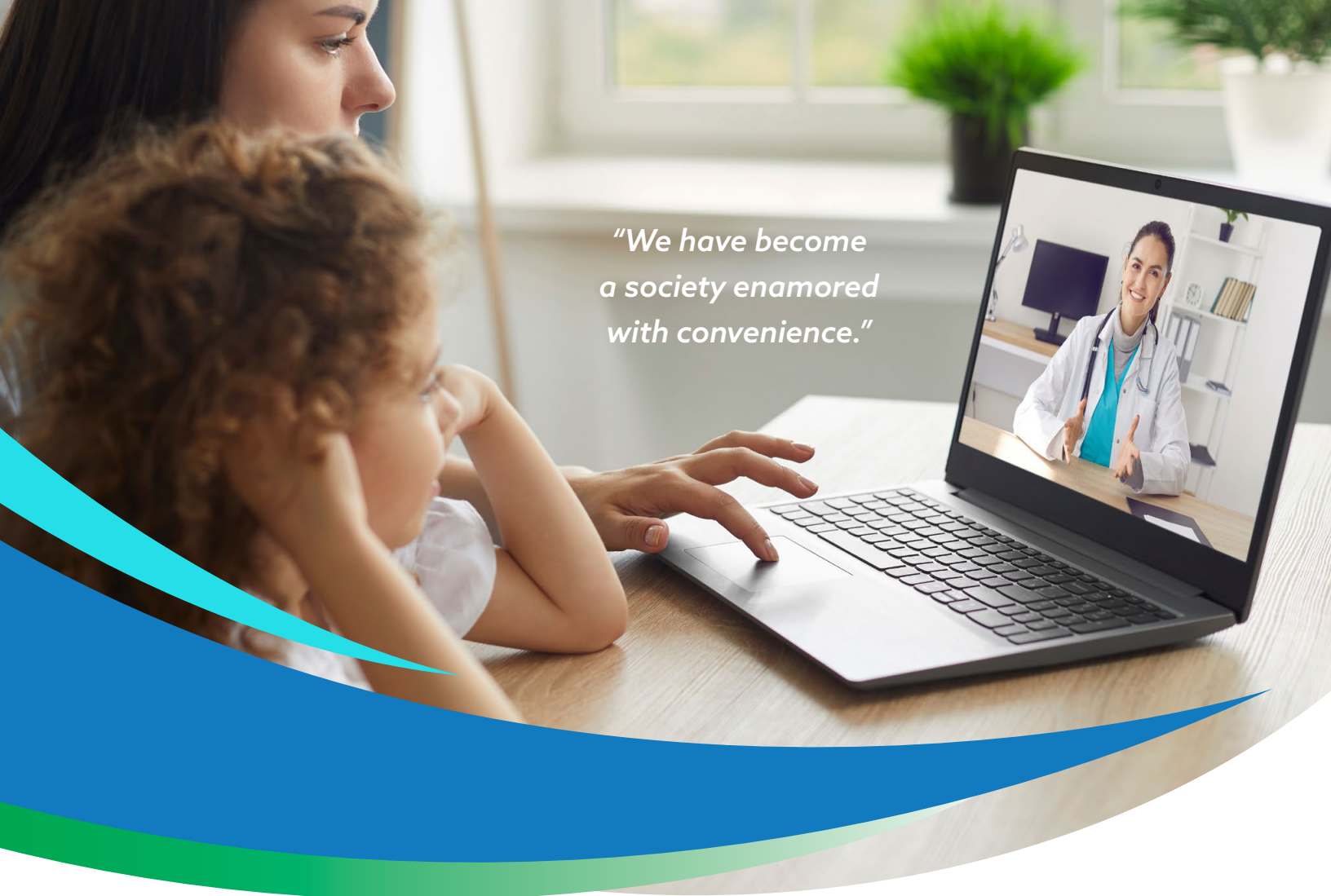# EMBRACING TELEHEALTH:
## Best Practices and Benefits for Providers and Patients

# hub
by HENRY SCHEIN®

## Discover best-in-class technology to manage every facet of your practice.

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*"We have become a society enamored with convenience."*

# introduction

We have become a society enamored with convenience. We seek out efficiency and ease in every aspect of our lives and healthcare is no different. There is perhaps little more convenient in the healthcare industry than telehealth.

While many think of telehealth as a product of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was around and growing before 2020 and will certainly be around long afterward. With that in mind, now is a great time for your practice to make sure you know all you can about this incredible tool and use it to its fullest potential. In this eBook, we will give an overview of telehealth, starting with a brief history and moving into the post-pandemic outlook. From there we'll talk about some benefits and best practices, before concluding with a list of what to look for in a telehealth solution. Let's get started.

# history of telehealth

While telehealth may seem like a recent development, it's been around in some form for quite some time.  One of the earliest records of the concept of telehealth came in a Lancet article from 1879 that talked about reducing unnecessary office visits using the telephone. Close to 50 years later, in 1925, the cover of *Science and Invention* magazine showed a doctor diagnosing a patient by radio, and an article inside imagined the ability to examine a patient from a distance using video.

In the 1940s, the first electronic medical record transfer occurred in Pennsylvania when radiology images were transferred 24 miles between two townships using telephone lines. In the 1950s, a Canadian doctor furthered this technology by building a teleradiology system that was used in the Montreal area. By the early 1960s, telemedicine was introduced to emergency medicine.

A great deal of progress in the technology used for remote monitoring can be credited to NASA due to their development in the Mercury space program. Additionally, the Public Health Department, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services all invested in telemedicine research in the 1960s and 70s. All of these historical advancements laid the groundwork for telehealth as we know it today.

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# telehealth outlook post-pandemic

Telehealth was already gaining in popularity and expected to continue in growth prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, but that growth was rapidly accelerated with the unique needs presented by large-scale lockdowns. Now, as the pandemic begins to slow down in many parts of the world, providers and patients alike are left wondering what the future may hold for telehealth.

Experts agree that demand for telehealth is likely to continue to grow post-pandemic. In fact, Frost & Sullivan predict the telehealth market will see sevenfold growth by 2025. This means that providers who launched telehealth in response to the pandemic should now begin to move from a reactive model to one of proactive strategy. While some limitations may return with regard to telehealth reimbursement, the service itself is here to stay.

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# how can the patient experience affect revenue?

Consumer-driven patients expect a level of customer service in addition to care. With this in mind, providing a strong patient experience is likely to increase your practice's revenue through patient retention and a better reputation.

**In fact, U.S. hospitals that provide a "superior" experience had profit margins averaging 50% greater than those who were rated as providing an "average" experience**. This makes perfect sense when you consider the cost of healthcare in the United States each year. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, patients spend more than $10,000 per year on average on healthcare costs, meaning that losing patients can mean a big hit to revenue, while retaining and even attracting new patients can create greater financial stability.

Additionally, prioritizing the patient experience doesn't only benefit patients, but staff as well. Employee satisfaction and retention both often increase with a focus on patient experience, reducing turnover costs. This, too, improves revenue.

# benefits of telehealth

The main reason for telehealth's staying power is the sheer amount of benefits this solution offers for everyone involved. The most notable benefit is the comfort and convenience patients experience when using telehealth. **The ability to see their provider from the comfort of their own home is something today's patients highly value**.

Another benefit is the ability to control the spread of infectious disease. This was one of the most attractive benefits of telehealth during the pandemic, as patients and healthcare workers were all able to reduce their potential exposure to illness by keeping as many appointments as possible virtual.

**From a provider standpoint, telehealth allows providers to expand their patient base. When appointments are virtual, geography is no longer a factor**. This enables providers to lend a hand in underserved areas without ever leaving their offices.

*"When appointments are virtual, geography is no longer a factor."*
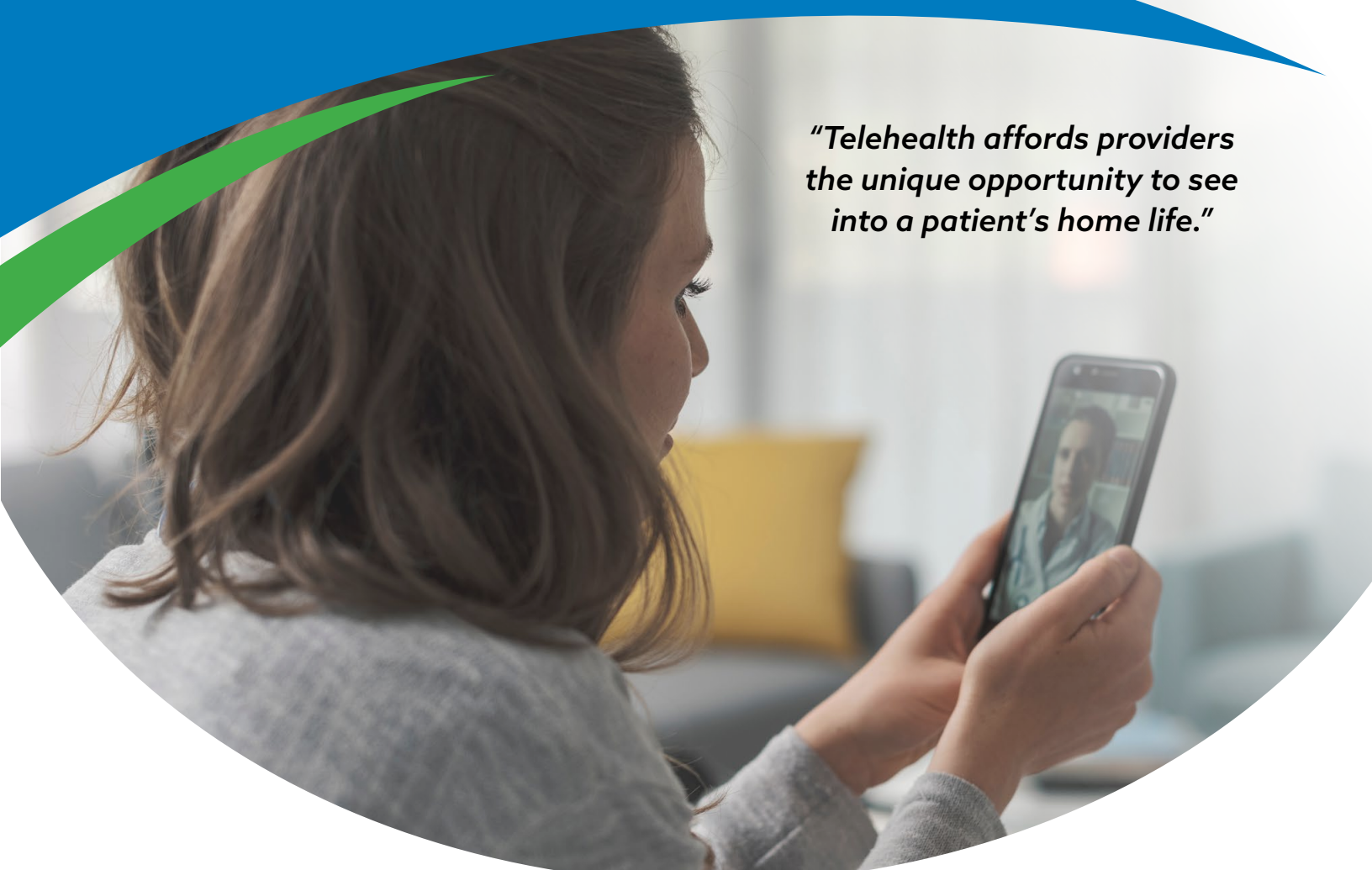
# benefits of telehealth, cont'd



*"When ideally implemented, telehealth streamlines a provider's workflow and allows for more patients to be seen efficiently. "*



Increased care collaboration is another benefit. **Since providers are no longer limited by geography and travel times, they can consult with the best of the best in providing patient care**. The ability to collaborate virtually also cuts down on the timeline needed, allowing for more timely treatment.

Providers are also likely to be less burnt out when telehealth is an option. **When ideally implemented, telehealth streamlines a provider's workflow and allows for more patients to be seen efficiently**. This helps providers to better balance their life and career and feel less exhaustion.

Finally, telehealth helps to **reduce costs for both providers and patients**. For providers, seeing patients virtually can help reduce practice costs by requiring less overhead. For patients, while the cost of care itself may be similar, the ability to miss less work and save on transportation costs is a great help.

# telehealth best practices

As with anything else in the healthcare industry, there are several best practices that will make telehealth run more smoothly. First, adapt your bedside manner to the new medium. This helps to build trust with your patient. You'll still need to listen, ask questions, make observations, and consider your history with the patient, but now you'll be doing so virtually. This means making sure you have good lighting, sound quality, and camera angles. Also, be sure to have professional surroundings and appearance, even if you're taking the virtual visit from home.

Next, pay attention to what's around the patient. Telehealth affords providers the unique opportunity to see into a patient's home life. This can allow for a better understanding of the factors impacting a patient's health. It's also possible to get a clearer picture of a patient's mental health and overall well-being by seeing them in their normal environment. Pay attention to these clues and consider them in diagnosing and decision making.

# telehealth best practices, cont'd

Be prepared to utilize digital tools. Without the benefit of formal lab work and an on-site vitals check, you can feel as if you're missing information. Thankfully, portable medical devices such as glucose monitors, blood pressure cuffs, and pulse oximeters can give useful metrics. Just be sure to vet any devices you'll be using for accuracy.

On the tech front, it's important to be mindful of protecting yourself and your patients from cybersecurity risks. Encrypt employee hard drives so that if one should ever fall into unauthorized hands, the data enclosed is safe. It's also a good idea to utilize two-factor authentication to ensure that the individuals who end up on a virtual visit are only those who are authorized to be included. Choose your solution carefully to make sure it's outfitted for not only convenience and ease of use, but also data security.

Finally, make sure telehealth is an integrated part of your workflow. You want telehealth visits to fit seamlessly into your schedule with no interruption in your day. It's also beneficial to create a clear workflow for how patients will be checked in and out and how co-pays will be collected and any necessary followups scheduled. Having all of this set ahead of time will make this process a pleasant one for all involved.

*"Portable medical devices such as glucose monitors, blood pressure cuffs, and pulse oximeters can give useful metrics."*

# what to look for in a telehealth solution

When it comes to telehealth, the importance of choosing the right solution can't be understated. You need a solution that's user friendly for all involved in order to have the best possible outcomes.

**First, choose a solution that offers robust integration**. Everything, including scheduling, patient information, video, audio, and your EHR should be accessible in the same interface for the best user experience.

Next, look for customization. **Your telehealth solution should be configured in a way that fits your practice workflow**. You never want to have to re-work your processes for a new program, so choose a solution that enables customization to better fit your needs.

Reimbursement support is also important. **Make sure that the solution you choose supports telehealth coding and communicates seamlessly with your practice management system**. This will prevent unnecessary difficulty with claims and a related reduction in revenue. Make sure to choose a solution that allows for easy patient access. Remember, patients see telehealth as offering convenience; make sure it's easy for them to log on and get connected.

*"You need a solution that's user friendly for all involved in order to have the best possible outcomes."*

# what to look for in a telehealth solution, cont'd

*"Take your virtual care to the next level by choosing a platform that supports telediagnostics. "*

Security is also important. Choose a solution that is HIPAA compliant and will protect patient information and give your practice peace of mind.

**Finally, take your virtual care to the next level by choosing a platform that supports telediagnostics. While traditional telehealth is great in certain circumstances, it has its limitations. With telediagnostics, providers can conduct an exam much the same as they would in person, but from a distance. For best results, choose a product with integrated cameras to get closer views, the ability to check vitals, and even EKG and ultrasound capabilities**.

Whatever your goals with telehealth, the best thing you can do is to decide what you want before you start researching vendors and look for a product that fits your needs and will get your practice to the level you want to attain.

# conclusion

Whether you began your adoption of healthcare a long time ago or jumped in with both feet at the beginning of 2020, you've likely realized by now the benefits that come along with such a program. As the pandemic continues to fade, don't let your telehealth usage fade with it. Your patients still want the convenience, and there are even greater benefits to be realized by practices that are willing to take a step into the future. There are so many possibilities with the right vendor, and that's why SolutionsHub works so hard to find best-in-class vendors to partner with your practice and take it to the next level. Talk to one of our experts today about how we can help you integrate telehealth like you never imagined.

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