

Expect opposition to telemedicine, especially if the practice has been operating the same way for many years. It can be daunting at first and takes time for the staff to adjust; however, when done correctly, the benefits will far outweigh the challenges. Your practice will be more efficient, cost effective and will offer more flexibility to patients and providers.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Technology – Choose a platform that will best serve your patients and will integrate with your electronic health record (EHR) system.

- Ensure the platform is encrypted and can be expanded as your practice grows.
- Before partnering with additional specialty practices, ensure your platform is compatible with the other systems being used.

Fortunately, telemedicine uses high-speed internet connections and high-definition cameras on devices that most patients and providers are already using.

Staff Training – Most of the available technologies do not require extensive training.

- Designate a “Super User” who will coordinate training with the technology partner for all staff members. It’s important that all staff involved are comfortable using the equipment. Make clear to those being trained how telemedicine will be integrated into the work flow. In addition to equipment training, it is helpful to also incorporate training exercises such as mock clinical scenarios to ensure all involved are comfortable with the use of the equipment.
- Your telemedicine clinic staff plays a vital role in educating and promoting the use of telemedicine in your practice. Therefore, it’s important they are prepared to address patient’s questions and concerns with confidence. Make sure your staff knows how to assist with the application download on the patients’ devices during the appointment and be able to demonstrate how it works.

Scheduling – Telemedicine visits may need to be fine-tuned more than in-person visits.

- Initially, schedule visits much like an in-person visit and adjust as necessary.
- The provider may schedule telemedicine visits between in-person visits or block off certain times during the day/week specifically for telemedicine visits.
- Do not over commit as this will affect satisfaction with both in-person and telemedicine visits. Be patient, start small and expand as needed.

Clinical Staffing – Ensure the level of personnel is available for the level of care needed for the patient. Patient care and presenting the patient can be provided by many different practitioners, licensed and unlicensed:

- o Advanced Practice Registered Nurses
- o Registered Nurses
- o Physician Assistants
- o Licensed Practical Nurses

Reimbursement – Since every state is different, it is important to understand what services are covered in the state where the patient is located. In many cases, the technology partner may be able to help you determine what telemedicine services are billable and at what level. The Arkansas Telemedicine Act provisions that telemedicine encounters will soon allow you to bill the same as a regular clinic visit with the telehealth modifier added to the billing code. Check with your licensing agency to verify billing eligibility. Each provider will need to work with the billing specialists to understand what modifiers are required. This link will take you to the Center for Connected Health Policy for a listing of current state telehealth laws and Medicaid program policies: <http://www.cchpca.org/state-laws-and-reimbursement-policies>.

Privacy & Compliance – Always choose a telemedicine platform that is HIPAA compliant and encrypted. The storage of video transmissions must be encrypted and maintained in a secure environment if the decision to store them is made by your compliance officer. The technology partner should be willing to sign a Business Associate Agreement that is binding and ensures they understand and follow HIPAA regulations. Patients may also have additional questions about privacy with video visits. Remember, informed consent is as important with telemedicine as is in person. If you have a patient that you will be seeing via telemedicine, make certain that a video consent form is on file for that patient. (Consider adding a video consent form to your existing privacy and consent policies for future telemedicine consults.)

Licensing & Credentialing – Providers must be licensed in the state where the patient resides. Some states participate in compact agreements. Providers should check with their licensing board to clarify laws and rules concerning practicing across state lines. Providers may need to be credentialed in the facility where they are providing consults. Contact hospital administration where the provider is employed to ensure proper credentials exist before offering telemedicine services. Some states allow for credentialing by proxy, however, others may require a full credentialing process.

When Is Telemedicine Appropriate – Not all patients are suitable candidates for a telemedicine visit. The patient should always be given the option for an in-person visit. Telemedicine encounters should offer the same level of service as a face-to-face encounter.