

Telemedicine: An Important Part of Healthcare's Future



Telemedicine, defined as the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration, is quickly becoming a crucial part of the future of healthcare. The market for telemedicine is one of the fastest growing sectors in healthcare, and is expected to continue expanding rapidly, as the pressure to improve the efficiency of care delivery while reducing costs increases.

One of the most important aspects of telemedicine is that it places the patient firmly into the focal point of care. There are drawbacks, of course, to the increasing reliance on technology, including the learning curve inherent to new technologies and the chance that technology has an impersonal effect on doctor-patient relationships.

There are positives to take from this as well. Much like a traffic roundabout reduces accidents by making drivers pay better attention, video conferencing with remote patients will likely force some doctors to improve their personal skills as they learn to connect with people not in the same room. It will also allow some people currently without access to care to receive it more easily.

The statistics surrounding the increased use of telemedicine are encouraging:

- **It's more convenient for patients.** Sixty-four percent of patients are willing to participate in a video visit with a doctor, per an online Harris Poll survey. Of those, 61 percent said convenience was a factor in this decision.
- **It's experiencing rapid growth.** There were nearly 50,000 remote physician consults in the US in 2013, more than twice the number hosted in 2011. The numbers of patients using telehealth technology worldwide will grow from 350,000 in 2013 to approximately 7 million by 2018.
- **It can reduce costs, while also providing value.** 62 percent of respondents to the Harris Poll thought video visits should be cheaper than an in-person visit. Researchers in an Alliance for Connected Care study found on average, telehealth visits cost between \$40 and \$50, compared to an average estimated cost of \$136 to \$176 for an in-office visit. They also found that 83% of health conditions were resolved after a virtual visit. Meanwhile, the entire market for hospital-based telehealth technology will grow to \$19.5 billion by 2019.

Check out the full [infographic here](#).

It's necessary to point out that with this increased use of technology, healthcare environments must continue to adapt and improve as well. As we've written before about the exam room, technology is opening new opportunities in healthcare, and it should be fully incorporated in exam rooms.

The [Steelcase Health Insights and Applications Guide](#) talks about healthcare design helping doctors and patients to communicate and engage with each other, and ensuring that family members and friends can also be involved, if needed. We encourage you to take a look!