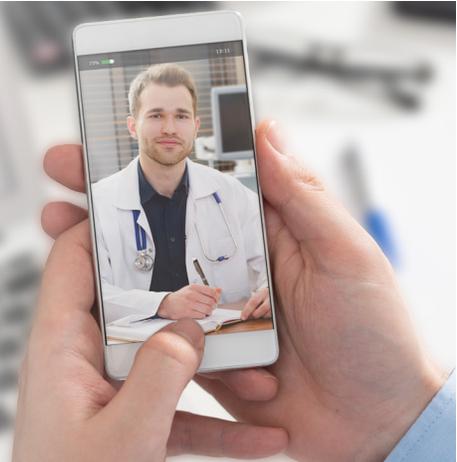




COVID-19 and Telehealth



COVID-19 and Telehealth Snapshot

Pre-COVID-19

- 9 out of 10 employers with more than 500 employees offered telehealth services, but less than 9% of employees used the service.
- Telehealth usage grew 53% between 2016 and 2017.
- 76% of hospitals had full or partial telehealth capabilities.

COVID-19 Actions

- On March 17, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced the temporary expansion of telehealth coverage.
- States followed suit and expanded coverage.
- 94 insurance providers updated telehealth offerings during social distancing.

COVID-19 Implications

- A survey of providers conducted March 31 showed that 97% of respondents were using some form of telehealth during COVID-19 social distancing.
- Approximately 51% of health center visits conducted in the last reporting period were conducted virtually.

WHY are telehealth visits increasing?

With social distancing measures being put in place across the country and a desire to keep the most vulnerable patients with chronic medical conditions from being exposed to infectious diseases during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) allowed for expanded coverage of telehealth services. Additionally, medical professional organizations across the country provided recommendations to their members for continuity of care utilizing numerous mechanisms, including telehealth services.

WHO is using telehealth?

Healthcare providers of all types are conducting telehealth visits for appointments that can be conducted without hands on examination, tests, or studies requiring the patient to be in an office. This includes private practitioners (primary care and specialty), clinics (rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers), and large healthcare systems. Direct to consumer telehealth companies are also experiencing a surge in users.

HOW is telehealth being used?

- Patient screening and triage for COVID-19 and influenza-like illness
- Pre- and post-operative visits
- Remote patient monitoring for routine management of chronic medical conditions
- Acute office visits for conditions that can be assessed and treated remotely

WHAT ongoing challenges exist for telehealth?

- Conflicting regulations between CMS waivers and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act
- Regulations for telehealth coverage vary between CMS and states and state by state
- Learning curve for physicians and healthcare providers
- Technology investment home monitoring equipment
- Lack of patient access to technology (smart phones, webcams, and broadband internet)

WHAT are telehealth trends to watch, post-COVID-19?

- The economic impact on COVID-19 response, yielding cost savings for telehealth treatment of respiratory illness versus in-office treatment
- Increased attention to regulatory updates to allowable telehealth services
- Patients may be more willing to seek treatment if telehealth is more convenient
- Patients may have access issues limiting their ability to successfully engage in telehealth
- Increased offerings of telehealth as part of benefits packages from large companies, thereby increasing demand
- Telehealth is not a replacement to traditional, office-based medical care, rather an augmentation under the right circumstances
- Additional study and regulation would be needed for continued large-scale use of telehealth

ASPR TRACIE COVID-19 and Telehealth Tip Sheet has additional information and sources cited.