

Complete transcript of Telehealth: What, Why, and How Can It Work For You?

[00:00:05] The health care dynamic is rapidly changing. Understanding the basic fundamentals related to the Business of Medicine empowers practitioners to advance their skills in, and knowledge of, the business aspects of medicine. SMA's Business of Medicine Simplified program explores the essentials of everything from reimbursement and compensation models, insurance and risk management, to practice employment and business finance.

[00:00:33] Telehealth: What, Why, and How Can It Work For You. Telehealth is a collection of means or methods for enhancing health care, public health, and health education delivery and support using telecommunications technologies. Telehealth encompasses a broad variety of technologies and tactics to deliver virtual medical health and education services. Join us for health technology insights, Telehealth: What, Why and How Can It Work For You. Doctors Andy Mohan and Reza Sadeghian will discuss the various aspects of telemedicine and how to use this information to the benefit of your patients in practice.

[00:01:11] **Reza Sadeghian (RS):** I'm going to be talking about some of the definition first to kind of bring a better perspective on what we mean by telehealth versus telemedicine. And out of all the definitions that are out there, the one that I really like is that, they said telehealth is really the, telehealth encompasses a broad variety of technology and techniques to deliver virtual medicine, health, and educational services. So, as we can figure out from this, telehealth is not a specific service, but a collection of means to enhance care and education delivery. Now when it comes to telehealth or telemedicine, "telemedicine" is often is still used when referring to traditional clinical diagnosis and monitoring that is delivered by such technology. However, the term "telehealth" is now more commonly used as it describe, as I said, the wide range of diagnosis and management education and other related field of health care. The next thing that I would like to talk about is a telehealth modality.

[00:02:30] **RS:** Telehealth encompasses four distinct domain of application as we normally refer to live video or synchronous which means that we have a live two-way interaction between a person -- could be a patient, caregiver, provider -- and a physician. Using audio-visual telecommunication technology, this is a real-time scenario and this is the one that may serve as a substitute for an inpatient care encounter when it's possible.

[00:03:05] **RS:** The second modalities store and forward, which is asynchronous type and this is a transmission of recorded health history. For instance, if you have an X-ray, if you have an image you want to send it to a dermatologist, if you have any EKG, this is the type of services that provider use most of the time to counsel, usually this specialist or service specialist to kind of get a second opinion. This can also be done through a variety of mediums such as email or secure text messaging.

[00:03:40] **RS:** The third modalities are remote patient monitoring, or what we call an RPM. And this is a personal health and medical data collection from individual in one location, most of

the time via electronic medical record, and then transmit it to the physician. That's where access is this data remotely from other location. And this type of service allow provider to continue to track healthcare data for a patient. Once, for instance, that patient is released at home or they're providing care under the primary care services. And this is the part that we're hoping, by using it, to reduce readmission rate. An example of those could be blood glucose monitoring services.

[00:04:27] **RS:** The last part, the last modality, is a mobile health. Or what we call "mHealth" or some people refer to as "mobile digital health". And these are health care and public health practice and education that are supported by this technology. So you can use your iPhone or Android phone or any other tablet that uses such application on it and use those application to promote the delivery of care through different mechanism. Now, telemedicine also has been growing rapidly and offers fundamental benefits, the four fundamental benefit that I really like the way American Telemedicine Association has focused on was first, access to care. One of the biggest challenges that we have been having over the past couple of decades is that how can we bring services to the remote area? When you go to a larger city, we have plenty of physicians. When you go to a smaller community, we don't have that luxury. So how can we use this to prove, to improve access to care?

[00:05:42] **RS:** Now the second part is a cost efficiency. As we all know, as of the latest reported GDP or our gross domestic product for healthcare spending is about 17.9 percent now. So reducing the cost of health care is one of the most important reason for adopting such technology and which is beneficial for patients, insurance, and also the hospital setting for shorter length of a state.

[00:06:15] **RS:** The third part is the improved quality. So, if we have enough tools to provide health care for individuals, that's one way to improve their quality of care. And two examples that I can think of is mental health and eICU. So these are some of the areas that technology have proven numerously that they can improve quality of care for those type of populations. And the last one, not the least one, is a patient demand. So consumer today, in today's world they're are more willing to accept technology, and once they realize that, "Oh, I don't need to travel such a long distance to see my specialist to consult about my follow-up of weight management." This is a huge improvement for them, and as you can go through the literature, there have been numerous studies that have documented patients satisfaction and support for telemedicine services.

[00:07:21] **RS:** Now from the provider perspective, if you want to focus on some of the areas that I alluded to in the previous slide, such as remote monitoring and mobile health, there are numerous application and devices that are available that physician can leverage, even in a smaller, outpatient community to support the needs of their patient. Some of the issues that are associated with those is whether or not the infrastructure of that facility can handle such technology. How we're going to collect some of this data as some of these apps are provided by a third party that they don't necessarily need to go through the FDA regulations, where we're going to collect those as the store those information, who is going to oversee those, and you know, the concern that we always have about HIPAA and the privacy of those information for the patient. With that being said, I want to get Andy's perspective on the provider side of the telehealth and mHealth. What do you think, Andy?

[00:08:34] **Andy Mohan (AM):** Thanks, Reza. Yeah, there's, there's a lot of great tools out there for providers and patients to utilize that would help in improving quality of care and managing disease -- real-time -- chronic conditions, those type of things. You know, that you have for diabetic patients, you have your insulin infusion pumps so you can, you can manage or real-time gauge glucose levels that your, your provider would be able to see, even if they had a hemoglobin A1c, they'd be able to see per day what the glucose levels are real-time so that those kind of things are kind of important. Medication devices, so compliance is always a big issue for, you know. Medication compliance for those, those elderly patients that are on chronic medications, whether they take them or not is always an issue, and in terms of them being frequent flyers into ED so monitoring those; there are devices that you can actually ensure that they're taking their medications and that would be sent via the Internet or the Web, so that data would be sent directly to your PCP. So there are devices like that. Always a pretty big issue.

[00:10:00] **AM:** There's also other remote patient monitoring devices. Of course there's education types of telehealth. I mean, there's so many different education, ways of educating patients or providers, as well; one of them being immunizations and growth milestone education applications. Just a lot of ways to do things that are out there now that can promote population health, which is a very big term now. Population health and making sure the masses are dealt with before they even get into the hospital, preventing them from getting, you know, from being admitted or having to see their their doctors on a regular basis. These type of devices are going to prevent that and essentially reduce healthcare costs like Reza mentioned before.

[00:10:54] **AM:** You know, the data collection of courses is, it's very, very important. And, you know, how a lot of these these applications are going to have methodologies on how they store the data that is accessible. Providers are going to want to know exactly how they're stored, how long they're stored for, and if there is some sort of protective layer based upon how they're stored to protect in terms of HIPAA and privacy and, you know, that data breach by, by hackers. That's always accessible. It just needs to be asked. And of course the collection of data is going to improve outcomes and the quality of care. And, and provide providers the ability of improving or bettering their clinical hype, hypotheses before even seeing a patient.

[00:11:53] **RS:** All right. So those are very great points, Andy. Thanks for bringing those up. As, as far as the patient perspective, I think, Andy also alluded to some of those examples I was going to mention here. But, I think it is very important for clinicians to understand that in today's time the patients and their families that are engaged with technology, they may aware of a lot more available tools that we even know as a physician exist, as we are very busy with our clinical work, with our documentation, and other issues that we deal with. And often when patients come to my practice, sometimes they teach me that, "Hey, have you seen this application that I can use?".

[00:12:46] **RS:** And it's amazing, especially the younger generation, how much they're involved with this technology and social media and they learn more. And if you look at the Apple and Google store where there are more, over 72,000 medical app; I mean, it's just so many applications available that we're worried about the privacy and the integrity of the app on the patient HIPAA. But he's also looking on the bright side. How can we leverage some of these

very easy tools to provide care for the patients and their family and also helps our workflow much easier and better in terms of providing care for those patients. Do you agree, disagree, Andy, with that?

[00:13:37] **AM:** Yeah, I do. I agree with what you're saying, Reza, I think that, you know, the way I'm looking at it from a patient perspective, you have the, the younger population, the younger group of patients, and then you have the older population. The younger group, obviously they are going to be very, very tech savvy. Most of them are pretty tech savvy, and I'd like to say that they're pretty conscious about their health too. There is, and, Reza, of course you're going to know about this a lot more than being being a pediatrician, but you know obesity, it's, it's, it is, it is an epidemic. But, you know, I, I tend to think that a lot of the kids I see are a lot more, they're a lot more health conscious. They're eating the right types of foods in schools, and, and they're also tech savvy. So they're, they're, they will be using a lot more of these mobile apps to educate themselves on, on, on their health, as well as monitoring their, their health status, their specific vitals, or whether they're, they're supposed to be on certain medications. They're going to be doing that a lot more, and we need to concentrate a lot more on this group; because they're gonna be living longer so they're going to live longer, so we need to make sure that they're a lot healthier, they're, they're not sedentary, they're less obese and they are using a lot of the tech that is available to them at their home that can be transmitted to providers.

[00:15:03] **AM:** The older population, you know, right now there is a statistic in terms of Medicare, we spend about \$40 billion a day on Medicare expense. That's, that's huge. So the older population, in terms of population health, is going to be kind of a vital area for a lot of physicians, family medicine physicians. Of course for you, Reza, being a pediatrician, you're much more focused on the kids, but these, this older population, they, they are not as tech savvy. They don't use these mobile applications. They shy away or unwilling, uninterested, and there, there are obviously myths that they, that, the data collection is going to be somewhat used as something that is intrusive. So it's intrusive on their, their privacy. That's obviously, for us that, we know, that that is not the truth. We need to educate them a lot more on using this. You know there are health coaches and those type of things that, that go out to these these, these patients' homes and educate them on other things, like fall risks and, and their nutrition those type of things, that prevent them from coming into the hospital. But perhaps there's an opportunity there for tech education as well.

[00:16:24] **AM:** You know, it's, that would definitely help reduce healthcare costs and these frequent flyers going into the ED and help providers manage their chronic disease and make sure they're compliant on their medications. And, and it's especially the non-life-threatening ones. We don't want the, we don't want the providers to have to, have to; these are only for acute illnesses and chronic diseases and to potentially refer to specialists. To stay away from the non-life threatening cases. Reza, what do you think?

[00:17:06] **RS:** I think those are very valid and great point, especially given, you know, in my field and you having two children going through some of those doctors' visit and leveraging some of the apps for you. I think that is, that's a brilliant approach and not only keeping the

doctors on their feet, but also you guys know what exactly is going on with the child. I think that those are very well use of technology.

[00:17:36] **RS:** The next one is about regulations and, you know, this is a big issue, reimbursement and malpractice. So, you know, a lot of people come and ask, you know, about the payment and coverage for the services that deliver under some of these larger telehealth, in particular, telemedicine, for, for, their, for their patients. So a very frequently asked question amount of clinician interested in using such technology is, "How does my state telemedicine policies compare to others?" "Which state offered the best policy for physicians in telemedicine?" Or, "Which states impose barriers to telemedicine access for patients and providers?" And, I think it's very important, to, it's very important to know, you need to know the reimbursement and medical practice rules in your states where you're practicing.

[00:18:43] **RS:** American Telemedicine Association has developed that very easy-to-use, state-by-state evaluation that they turn into their report and call it "Gap Analysis Coverage and Reimbursement" which we have the link for you at the end of this podcast. So what it does, it extracts and compares physician practices' standard for telemedicine for every estate in the US, and then ultimately, by evaluating different protocols in terms of physician patient encounter, telepresenter that informed consent of licensure and some other mechanism and metrics, they assign a grade which indicates existing policy barriers that inhibit the use of technology, which is telemedicine, that would enable the patient provider a choice to quality healthcare service in that state. So I highly encourage people to take a look at this document. It's a PDF file. Look up their states if they have any question regarding the use of technology and seeing patients in terms of reimbursement and licensure and practice standards and we would be happy to help you guys out if you need more information on those. But as far as I would say is, this is an issue with every state and clinicians and it varies from state to state. So it's really important to be up to date with the rules and regulation in your state. Andy, do have anything to add to this?

[00:20:22] **AM:** Yeah, I have couple of things to add. Reimbursement, over time, at least the last five years for telemedicine; they have increased the number of codes so there are, there are an increasing number of codes that I've seen. I think that malpractice in the future, they will, I think that they will protect providers more. The reimbursement in terms of malpractice reimbursement. Reimbursement is apples to apples. You know, you're going, in a lot of those codes, you're going to get reimbursed the same amount if you see them through telemedicine or if you see them in the office.

[00:21:01] **AM:** So what does that mean? You're actually going to be able to see more patients. Which would be, which is, you know key for providers, especially because there's a higher population of patient pool. And then there's going to be less providers. So you're going to be able to see more patients; you're getting paid the same amount; you're going to be able to provide a better quality of care. And it's just going to be better overall. And I do think that, you know, in what I've seen, is that, in, especially in the rural setting, there's actually telemedicine there's a decrease in malpractice versus the urban setting. So there's, you know, in a sense, there's a lot of disparity. I think that things will change. I think there will be that reduction or protection for providers for malpractice and that reduced risk.

[00:21:57] Want to learn more about these topics? Make plans to attend SMA's Southern Regional Assembly June 27-29 in Birmingham Alabama. Visit SMA.org/assembly for more information and to register.