Best Practices:
Optimizing Telehealth in Patient Care

A notable aspect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is the near impossibility of patients making in-person appointments with their providers and getting the care they need through face-to-face interactions. For many patients, the transition from in-person to virtual appointments can be a challenging adjustment, one that leads to them not receiving care they may desperately need. For providers, it can also be challenging to adjust workflows and identify ways to engage with patients in this new world of virtual care.

To help you and your patients make this transition, we have developed a few best practices to guide you along the telehealth adoption journey.

1. Develop a strategy to engage the entire practice.

a. Organize your digital practice by using a platform that is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

b. Inform your patients of your availability and how to reach you

c. Provide resources to help your patients overcome digital barriers to cross the digital divide

2. Consider your patients' communications preferences and needs.

a. Do your patients prefer connecting with you by phone, text, email, or the patient portal?

b. Do your patients prefer written or oral communications?

c. What consent and permissions are needed for care? Are there healthcare proxies or surrogates on behalf of the patient?

3. Prioritize patients who need outreach by using the "Members Missing Services List" emailed to you monthly, or access this information via the Healthfirst Quality APP in the Healthfirst Provider Portal. These reports will help you identify:

a. Patients with multiple chronic conditions

b. Patients with urgent needs

c. Patients with the highest number of care gaps

4. Set up a protocol to determine when in-person visits are essential, and establish in-office visit standards that will make patients feel safe.

5. Develop a list of options that bring care to the patient.

    a. Medication delivery options

    b. In-home lab draws

    c. In-home testing

    d. E-consults for specialist care

6. Create a checklist to review with every patient.

    a. Chronic condition management (including when to call PCP, when to go to Urgent Care, when to go to ER)

    b. Medication access

    c. Open care opportunities

    d. Mental Health Screening/support available

7. Document care in record using appropriate coding and bill for service.

8. Complete in-person elements when circumstances permit. These elements include, at a minimum, the comprehensive physical exam; office testing, including laboratory testing; hearing, vision, and oral health screening; fluoride varnish; and immunizations.

Be sure to direct your patients to these resources that will help them feel comfortable with telehealth visits.

- Five tips to prepare for your first telemedicine visit:
  https://hscnews.usc.edu/five-tips-to-prepare-for-your-first-telemedicine-visit

- American Medical Association® Telehealth Implementation Playbook:
  https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf

- A Patient's Guide to Telemedicine: What to Do When Your Doctor Calls or Video-Chats with You:
  https://www.himss.org/news/patients-guide-telemedicine

- Patient's Guide to Telehealth: How to Use Virtual Healthcare:
  https://www.edumed.org/resources/patients-guide-to-telehealth-virtual-healthcare/

In alignment with federal guidance, Healthfirst is temporarily waiving the telehealth privileging process and allowing providers to render and bill for medically needed telehealth services through Healthfirst. However, providers should complete the privileging process to ensure that they can bill and render for telehealth services in the future. For more information, please contact your Healthfirst Network Account Manager.