

TELEMEDICINE IS HERE TO STAY

So How Does It Change
the Dynamics of Healthcare
and Your Role?

An Ipsos White Paper



GAME CHANGERS



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So How Does It Change the Dynamics of Healthcare and Your Role?

COVID-19 has shifted the paradigm of healthcare delivery, turning medical visits once widely done in-person into a virtual experience for both physicians and patients. As telemedicine was slowly gaining traction in the U.S. healthcare system, the pandemic prompted a surge in its use as providers scrambled to keep their offices and healthcare facilities open as state lockdowns ensued. Global Ipsos studies earlier in 2020 and recent interviews with key healthcare stakeholders indicate that **telemedicine is here to stay...but the critical question becomes: In what way?** Will it find a niche role in certain areas in the post-COVID landscape where it is as effective as in-person visits, or will barriers prove too significant to overcome for telemedicine to persist long term?

Stakeholders across the healthcare space, including pharmaceutical manufacturers, must now account for this evolving treatment landscape.

Companies must look to:

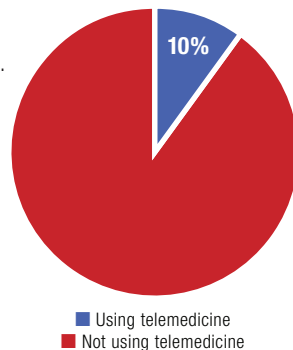
- Develop a deeper understanding of the new patient journey
- Support telemedicine usage among providers
- Enable their products with appropriate support tools and programs to be successful in this new, telemedicine-enabled environment

PRE-COVID TELEMEDICINE LANDSCAPE

Prior to COVID-19, telemedicine did not play a significant role in many physician practices and hospitals. According to Ipsos' COVID-19 Surveillance Report (April 2020),¹ **only 10% of HCPs had seen patients via telemedicine before COVID-19.**

Pre-pandemic, the top driver for telemedicine utilization was improved patient access to care. Telemedicine's virtual nature presented a convenient means for not only patients in rural areas to get follow-up care but also those from lower socio-economic backgrounds facing transportation and financial restrictions. However, **the drivers of telemedicine before**

Pre-COVID Utilization



the pandemic were far outweighed by barriers, leading to low overall telemedicine utilization. The most significant barrier was the **uncertainty around reimbursement of virtual care visits**, as some physicians noted services were either not reimbursed at all or reimbursed at 25% of in-person rates.

Technological issues were also notable barriers in most practices before COVID, such as inadequate EMR integration, lack of proper equipment, infrastructure cost, and patient unfamiliarity.

You are putting a lot of time and effort into doing this, and **if you can't get reimbursed for it, then you ask yourself, "What's the point of doing it in the first place?"** I'll just bring them into the office, where there's a structured way of getting reimbursed."

— DERMATOLOGIST

STATE OF TELEMEDICINE DURING COVID

COVID-19 caused unprecedented changes to the health-care system. Physicians reported decreased in-office patient volumes and a significant increase in telemedicine visits once COVID hit, with telemedicine accounting for 100% of patient visits in some practices. Since then, as practices have adjusted to the new requirements for care delivery, telemedicine has settled to a level that is significantly higher than pre-COVID, creating an operational middle ground that varies by practice and specialty.

The **largest pre-COVID barrier** to the use of telemedicine was reimbursement, but that changed with CMS's modifications to telemedicine guidelines, including reimbursing telemedicine visits at-parity with in-office visits, expanding telemedicine coding/billing structure, and increasing the scope of covered telemedicine services. These welcome changes in Medicare were mirrored by commercial insurance providers, granting physicians an economically viable path to telemedicine usage.

It was good when we heard that the Feds were on board with Medicare to allow for telemedicine. And **I commend Medicare to CMS for making that happen**, because really it would have been the death of the small practices. When CMS said, "Okay, look, we'll pay at par for telemedicine visits."

And then, Blue Cross, which is the other leading provider for my area, said, "Okay, we'll do it."

Every insurer came on board and said, "We'll just pay you the same rate.

Just practice medicine and keep these people alive and do it."

— INTERNAL MEDICINE

¹ Ipsos' COVID-19 Surveillance Report. Ipsos. Published April 2020.

Healthcare facilities adapted to the surge in telemedicine usage. Education on new billing codes, changing scheduling processes, and onboarding of telemedicine platforms were critical factors in adopting telemedicine successfully and efficiently.

Operational adjustments included modifying EMRs to include telemedicine notation, improving intrateam communication to manage different streams of care, and training hospital staff to

use new technology. From a tangible technology perspective, practices improved Wi-Fi to facilitate video calls, upgraded telephone systems, increased the number of monitors per person, and purchased third-party telemedicine platforms to comply with confidentiality and privacy regulations.

While certain barriers persisted, increased usage during the pandemic uncovered additional benefits of telemedicine.

Additional Benefits of Telemedicine Discovered During COVID	Barriers That Still Remain During COVID
Increased flexibility for providers and patients	Patients' lack of technological proficiency
Increased efficiency of in-person visits, through pre-screening patients over the phone and reducing total volume of in-office visits	Patients not understanding appropriate cases for using telemedicine, and physicians' need to spend time explaining when it should be used
Greater awareness of virtual care options, saving patients and insurance plans money	Billing issues with virtual appointments
Reduced urgent-care burden on doctors and hospitals	

So, What Is the Prognosis for Post-Covid Telemedicine?

COVID-19 accelerated telemedicine adoption to unprecedented, yet unsustainable, levels across the U.S. What does the outlook for telemedicine services look like, as the temporary policies that incentivized usage loosen, and practices return to traditional in-office visits?

Physicians and patients have had positive experiences with telemedicine during the pandemic, driven primarily by increased access and improvements in practice efficiency and flexibility. Physician practices have also **overcome the one-time barriers of developing the technology infrastructure and know-how of utilizing telemedicine**. In the same vein, practices have developed operational equilibriums in which telemedicine can be successfully deployed around in-patient visits. Additionally, the increased utilization has allowed physicians to develop an understanding of **which services are appropriate for virtual care**, such as management of chronic conditions. Finally, telemedicine gives physicians the ability to **expand their practice** by offering virtual services outside of traditional office hours.

If you didn't have a portal, you weren't offering telemedicine. The biggest barrier was getting the equipment and getting on the portal.

— CARDIOLOGIST

Despite these drivers, **reimbursement will play the biggest role in the longevity of increased telemedicine usage.**

If—or more likely, when—payers stop reimbursing telemedicine services at parity to in-person visits, there will be a sharp decline, as financial incentives still appear to be the largest driver of provider behavior.

It depends on what they're going to pay. If they're going to pay 30% of an in-office visit [for a telemedicine visit], then really the only time I would ever use it, would be to extend the hours of my practice as a provider. **I don't want to give up the daytime visits to something that's going to pay 30% or 40% of what it would be if they came in.**

— INTERNAL MEDICINE

The importance of **human connection** will also remain a significant barrier moving forward. Doctors will continue having difficulty creating the same atmosphere of an in-person appointment while interacting virtually with a patient, which impacts not only the social aspect of the visit, but potentially the accuracy of diagnosis and assessing patients' emotions.

In analyzing the drivers and barriers for telemedicine in the post-COVID landscape, it becomes clear that while telemedicine is here to stay, its current utilization levels will decrease. Physicians will only deploy telemedicine where it can act as a

facsimile to traditional in-person care; KOLs anticipate that **post-COVID telemedicine utilization will represent 15–20% of all patient visits** in most practices.

How Will It Impact Manufacturers?

Knowing that telemedicine will have an ongoing role in the provider-patient relationship, the key question is: **How should manufacturers modify their value proposition to be best set up for long-term success?**

The Patient Is Key

CARDIO JOURNEY TRIGGER POINTS		INCREASED TELEMEDICINE IMPACT	
Origination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that more individuals recognize their symptoms early on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More free time for home research Need for individuals to recognize their own symptoms, also determined by a decrease in doctor-patient interactions Symptom recognition tools developed for early disease detection 	
Information Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate access to information on condition so that more individuals link symptoms to possible CVD conditions Ensure that individuals recognize when they need to see a doctor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher usage of telemedicine by patients will accelerate information gathering and remove some barriers to in-person visits Health-focused internet portals increase patient understanding and capability to have an open dialogue with HCP's 	
Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that GP discusses and diagnoses CVD condition Favor doctor's decision to start treatment in early stages of conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More frequent use of telemedicine to respond to specific cardiac events Increased utilization of remote diagnostics will accelerate diagnosis Increased utilization of doctor-appointment platforms will accelerate time of diagnosis 	
Treatment Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Favor appropriate treatment regimen choices by MD/specialist In case of self-diagnosis, give patients the instruments to choose the appropriate treatment class for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased adoption of remote patient monitoring devices will support telemedicine utilization in chronic CVD conditions E-detailing provides more flexible touchpoints to the physician 	
On-Going Condition Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure timely management of condition at regular intervals Favor reconsideration of treatment decisions as condition evolves over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved scheduling and interactions through telemedicine drives better monitoring of condition progression and treatment efficacy Utilizing telemedicine consults will allow for better continuity of care between acute hospitals/specialists and primary care 	
Persistence/ Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that patients do not autonomously decide to drop out of treatment regimen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased use of telemedicine will allow for more frequent HCP-patient touchpoints to manage adherence and keep patients on treatment regimen 	

Let's start with the hypothetical journey of **patients** dealing with cardiovascular diseases, and how the changing telemedicine landscape impacts both patients and physicians. As illustrated in the chart above, telemedicine can impact patient care in a variety of ways, such as allowing more frequent responses to cardiac events.

- How does telemedicine impact the way your patient deals with their conditions, how they seek product information, their relationship with their physician, and how they choose sites of care?
- Where within the journey are the key intervention points, “the moments that matter”?
- Where you can provide unique and meaningful value to the consumer?

More than ever, patients are taking control of their health, and through telemedicine, manufacturers can develop innovative ways to improve their digital strategy and enhance patient engagement. In particular, companies should ensure existing patient support systems can be engaged with digitally, and that providers are appropriately directing patients to these resources. These measures allow patients to better understand their treatment, and can greatly increase compliance.

The blockbuster drug of the 21st century is the engaged patient.

—TELEMEDICINE NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE

Telemedicine also allows for improved data capturing to drive treatment decisions, both at a patient-specific level and a population health level. Patients are increasingly willing to share medical data with manufacturers to improve outcomes. What sort of initiatives could be developed to leverage patient contribution in telemedicine? Think strategically and empathetically about how you use this new information to develop a more trusted relationship with your patients.

The Providers Need Support

Telemedicine usage also affects the manufacturers' relationship with **providers**. How can you support the HCP community as they use telemedicine more in their practice? While compliance must be considered, industry stakeholders should ensure that provider partners and their patients feel supported. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, from teaching HCPs how to help patients utilize support programs, to educating providers on appropriate usage and administration of their products over a digital medium. Already, companies and brands are creating digital materials and interactive experiences for physicians to share with patients during remote visits. What marketing and educational materials make sense for you and your brands?

The Product Message Is Essential

Finally, telemedicine will play a role in your **product** story as well. Because the telemedicine platform reduces the barrier to provider-patient interactions, it improves access to treatments. The more frequent and immediate interaction can also help tackle a key barrier to product adherence; patient forgetfulness.² How can you use the telemedicine platform to better communicate your product's message and reinforce its use case? Telemedicine does not mean that you should change your product's positioning and message; however, you may need different tools to get that message across, using more succinct and interactive methods than before.

In summary, manufacturers need to have a proactive strategy on how to leverage the growing use of telemedicine; a strategy that clearly considers your patient journey, relationship with providers and product message. To be truly ahead of the curve, manufacturers must consider telemedicine as a component of their overall digital and connected health strategy.

² *Improving Medication Adherence*. Deloitte. Published 2016.

Past Thinking	New Thinking	New Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patients generally relied on HCP office visit for guidance and information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patients are taking health into their own hands. Patients are sharing information more readily. Patients are more technologically savvy. Patients are looking for product education and support while at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an updated patient journey along with key inflection points.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manufacturers developed traditional in-office tools to help support HCPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manufacturers need to create digital ready tools for HCPs that they can use during telemedicine visits with patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess most impactful manufacturer services to provide to HCPs, including PSPs, patient compliance tools, data gathering, etc. Develop patient support tools and programs that are more digitally connected.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telemedicine was too niche to be considered as part of your overall digital strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telemedicine must now be integrated into your overall digital strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how telemedicine can be utilized in the context of remote monitoring and diagnosis.

CONTACT

Alex Colborn

Ipsos Healthcare

Alex.Colborn@ipsos.com

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