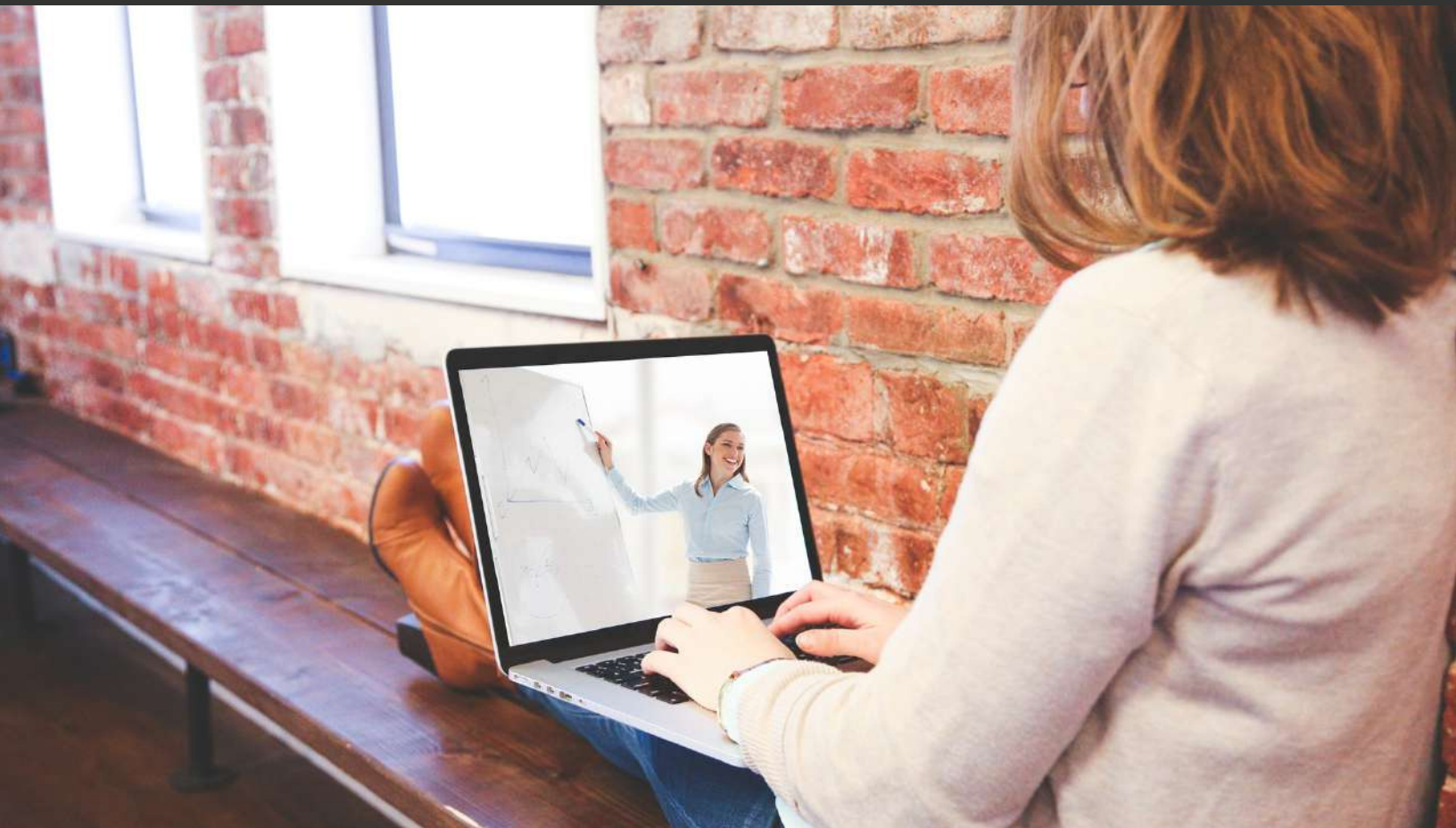


# FLEX CEUs



## Telehealth Rehabilitation



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## Introduction

The demand for telehealth services has become increasingly popular in the modern healthcare system. While many patients are looking to take advantage of virtual services many practitioners are left trying to figure out how to safely and effectively offer telehealth. In this CE you will learn the fundamentals of how to offer telehealth and how to immediately implement services into your practice.

## Section 1: What is Telehealth Rehabilitation?

**Definition:** Telehealth is the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to remotely provide health care information and services.<sup>1</sup>

Telehealth or telemedicine, sometimes used interchangeably, uses technology as a virtual platform to deliver medical care.<sup>1</sup> The literature shows many benefits to telehealth and telemedicine services. Historically, some of the benefits to telehealth has been improved patient access to care in rural locations and expedited examinations in traumatic cases.<sup>1</sup> However, with the rise of COVID-19 telehealth has become the fastest-growing sector of healthcare in part due to the reduction in infection risk for both patients and doctors. It should be noted that telehealth and telemedicine are a broad category of services that encompass several models for the delivery of services. The models of delivery include<sup>1</sup>

- **Synchronous:** telehealth services in which health information is assessed and discussed in real-time with the patient. Within the synchronous model of telehealth delivery, Within synchronous services Facilitated Virtual Visits (FVV) are when a patient goes to a medical facility to utilize medical equipment for diagnostic or treatment purposes and conducts a telehealth visit with a remote provider. In most cases, a Telefacilitator such as a Physical Therapy Aide or Assistant is at the facility to gather the appropriate data. An example of a Facilitated Virtual Visit would be a patient taking part in a running gait analysis with a remote practitioner. The patient would arrive at the clinic, a PT Aide would gather the gait analysis data and transmit the data to the practitioner for a video conference analysis and discussion with the patient.
- **Asynchronous:** telehealth services that are not delivered in real-time. Often this is described as the “store-and-forward” technique, where a patient or practitioner collects medical data and sends that data for diagnostic and/or treatment expertise. An example of asynchronous telemedicine would be an in-person

practitioner collecting the subjective and objective portions of an initial examination and then forwarding that data to a physical therapist.

- **Remote Patient Monitoring:** the continuous evaluation of a patient's clinical status, either by direct video monitoring or tests and images collected remotely. An example would be the remote monitoring of a patient's heart rate and blood pressure while in the ICU.

### **What patients are eligible for Telehealth Rehabilitation?**

Each practitioner must decide what patients are eligible for Telehealth services. While there are many patients that benefit from telehealth there are some that are not appropriate. The following questions are posed to help practitioners decide if patients are appropriate for virtual services.<sup>4</sup>

- Ethical implications:
  - Would this patient's care be the same or improved by telehealth services?
  - Would there be any way this patient could benefit from in-person care?
  - Do I feel confident that I have examined this patient sufficiently to initiate care?
  - Do I feel this patient poses a risk to themselves or others by implementing remote services?
- Medical concerns:
  - Is the patient a fall risk?
  - Does the injury necessitate in-person treatment?
  - Does the patient have comorbidities that make remote care difficult or create a need for direct supervision?
    - Cardiovascular disease
    - Neurological movement disorders
    - Cognitive disabilities
    - Diabetic concerns

- Patient capacity:
  - Will this patient be able to use and operate the technology needed during a telehealth session?
- Socioeconomic:
  - Does this patient have reliable access to technology?
  - Can this patient afford the costs associated with using technology?

### **What are the pros and cons of telehealth rehabilitation?**

There are many benefits to Telehealth Rehabilitation. Not only does telehealth improve patients' access to care but it reduces the risk of possible infection. Advantages to the patient include<sup>5</sup>

- Access to medical care in remote locations
- Quicker examinations for urgent conditions
- Reductions in recovery time
- Reductions in the need for transportation
- Reduction in scheduling conflicts
- Reductions in COVID-19 infections

However, just as telehealth offers many benefits, there are also limitations for patients. Some limitations include<sup>5</sup>

- Lack of in-person rapport
- Difficulties accessing technological
- Lack of manual therapy
- Objective examinations

Just as patients benefit from telehealth, so do clinicians. Many applications apply to practitioners from financial, clinical, and liability standpoints. These include

- Reductions in overhead costs are a major factor when considering telehealth services. Without the need for a physical location business owners can hire more clinicians, pay them higher wages, and offer additional benefits and perks.
- Additional revenue streams for the clinic with remote patients which were previously inaccessible due to location.
- Expedited evaluations and faster decisions on their clinical care to better direct course of treatment.
- Decreases commute times and reductions in transportation costs
- Decrease exposure to infections with virtual services

However, as clinicians, it is our duty to consider not only what is best for our practice but for our patient's well-being. Some of the disadvantages to telehealth include

- Lacking in-person objective examinations causes a gap in the data collected from patients without being able to palpate, assess or at times visibly see an injury.
- Practitioners needing to perform hands-on treatment techniques to reach patient outcomes
- Inability to monitor patients medical status.

## **Section 1: Summary**

Telehealth is the fastest growing sector of healthcare since the rise of COVID-19. Services can be divided into synchronous, asynchronous, and remote patient monitoring. Practitioners should be the ultimate decision-makers as to whether a patient is appropriate for telehealth services. While there are many advantages to utilizing telehealth with patients there are also several disadvantages. Some advantages include better access to care, reductions in transportation reliance, and decreased risk to infection while some of the disadvantages include technology accessibility, lack of in-person evaluations, and reduced treatment options.

## **Section 1: Key Concepts**

- Telehealth: the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to remotely provide health care information and services.

- Telehealth can be delivered synchronously, asynchronously, or via remote patient monitoring
- Not all patients will be appropriate for telehealth services. Consider your patient's medical implications and accessibility to technology prior to initiating telehealthcare.
- There are many advantages and disadvantages to telehealth. Consider a patient's access to care and technology along with the injury type before initiating telehealth treatment.

### Section 1: Key Terms

- **Telehealth:** the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to remotely provide health care information and services.
- **Synchronous:** telehealth services in which health information is assessed and discussed in real-time with the patient.
- **Facilitated Virtual Visits (FVV):** synchronous telehealth services when a patient goes to a medical facility to utilize medical equipment for diagnostic or treatment purposes and conducts a telehealth visit with a remote provider.
- **Asynchronous:** telehealth services that are not delivered in real-time. Often this is described as the “store-and-forward” technique, where a patient or practitioner collects medical data and sends that data for diagnostic and/or treatment expertise.
- **Remote Patient Monitoring:** the continuous evaluation of a patient's clinical status, either by direct video monitoring or tests and images collected remotely.

### Section 1: Case Study

A 45-year-old patient inquires for a free consultation to determine if telehealth would be appropriate for her as a treatment option. During the consultation, the clinician learns that the patient suspected she sprained her ankle 2 weeks ago while running. The patient works as a software engineer and is well versed in utilizing video conference platforms such as Zoom.

- Would this patient be a candidate for Telehealth rehabilitation? If so, which type?



- What questions would you ask during the first visit to rule out the need for additional in-person examination or imaging?

## **Section 1: Personal Reflection Question**

How can healthcare practitioners better identify patients that would benefit from telehealth services?

## **Section 2: Operational Needs for Telehealth Rehabilitation**

### **What technology do I need to perform Telehealth?**

In order to conduct telehealth appointments, clinicians will need secure appropriate technology. Start with a strong WIFI connection that is consistent and reliable. Tech experts suggest upgrading routers to “business” and to have WIFI extenders in hard to reach areas of the workspace. Additionally, a backup of a “personal hotspot” from a smartphone can usually support video conferences but is at times inconsistent and will use copious amounts of pricey data. Additionally, it is essential to be able to hear and clearly speak to patients when conducting a telehealth visit. Experts suggest using headphones or a headset with a built-in microphone. Remember that practitioners may be getting up and down from their desk during a visit so a wireless head unit may be necessary. Lastly, having a clear and consistent video during virtual appointments helps not only to gather appropriate data from the patient but allows for accurate decisions when creating a patient's plan of care. While the video quality is often directly linked to the WIFI capabilities ensure clinicians have either an external webcam or have a built-in camera so patients can clearly see them.

### **Virtual telehealth video platforms**

When selecting a virtual platform for video conferencing with patients it is important to consider several important factors. The service should be intuitive and easy to use for both the patient and clinician. Additionally, consider what types of treatment or use cases will be implemented with patients. Will you need to demonstrate corrective exercises? Will you need a screen sharing option or chat option? Some emerging companies include:

- OhMD
- Doxy.me

- SnapMD
- Zoom Health

### **Home Exercise Program platforms**

Specific to rehabilitation, patients need to learn how to do corrective exercises. While there are many aspects which differentiate HEP platforms it's important to think about how the HEPs will be used with patients. Many practitioners use videos to reinforce what they want patients to do at home and use them to teach corrective exercises. Other practitioners utilize apps to collect patient data such as pain level during an exercise, track how many times the patient has completed their HEP, and even allow the patient to message them. Most HEP platforms require a subscription but a fundamental level, if you don't want to purchase or enroll in a HEP platform you could even send your patients a homemade video of you doing the corrective exercise. Some emerging HEP video platforms include

- MedbridgeGO
- PT Pal
- HEP2Go (pictures only)

### **Electronic Medical Records platforms**

As we all know operational processes such as scheduling, documentation, and billing can make or break a practice and there are many options for practitioners. Some considerations when making a decision about EMR (Electronic Medical Record) specific to telehealth services include the remote nature of telehealth. Remember, if an EMR requires many in-person touchpoints it may not be a good match for a telehealth practice. Additionally, good EMRs will have documentation, scheduling, marketing, billing, and practice management all in one platform. Here are a couple EMRs that clinicians use.<sup>2</sup>

- WebPT
- Heno
- Clinicient
- EPIC
- Theraoffice

## **Support staff**

*Administrative staff:* When starting or initiating a telehealth service it may be tempting to not utilize a support staff. However, while this may be sustainable for a short period of time while the patient census is low a clinic will eventually need support staff. Additional staff will help with scheduling, incoming calls, emails, new appointment requests, billing concerns, and frequently asked questions. With the benefit of telehealth being offered remotely the support staff member(s) will not need to be in the same location or city of the practice.

*Physical Therapy Aides:* The use of a physical therapy aide is occasionally used during telehealth appointments. During facilitated virtual visits often aides are utilized to collect necessary data from the patient however, they are rarely used during a video conference. Additionally, since the patient will not be receiving supervised electrical stimulated and/or cryotherapy or thermotherapy they are not required for setting up patients.

## **Telehealth Marketing**

Additional operational needs include a marketing strategy. As recent studies show Telehealth Rehabilitation on the rise in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, it shows that many patients are open to taking advantage of these services. However, there is much more that goes into marketing.

## **Identifying and approaching patients for telehealth services**

While many patients are interested in telehealth, most are unaware that it is a viable option for their treatment needs. Current, new, and prospective patients should be educated on how services work and function. The patients and prospective patients can learn about this several ways.

- Office administrators and office staff
- Direct questions via email or phone call with the practitioner
- Free consultations

## **Free consultations**

When looking to increase patient census it is advisable to perform 10-15 minute free consults with patients to explore telehealth services. As schedules fill it is advisable to discontinue doing these consultations. However, it is essential to designate either an

email address for inquiries or designate a staff member to answer questions. During free consultations, there are several goals. It's important to decide if the patient is eligible for telehealth services, if they will be successful in telehealth services, and how the clinician will start helping the patient achieve their goals utilizing telehealth. Most importantly if the patient is interested, schedule a time for their initial evaluation before you get off the video call.

## **Website**

When looking to expand your telehealth presence make sure your website is up to date. Additionally, make sure telehealth is listed, it's recommended by some to put this on your "homepage" or landing page. That way patients can find it easily. Additionally, create a separate tab on your website to list all the information patients need to know about telehealth services. In this section should include

- Information about the length of visits
- What to expect during your visit
- Insurance and out of pocket rates
- Common forms including consent, past medical history, and functional outcome measures
- FAQ

## **Market within the medical community**

Traditionally, physical therapists have marketed to medical practitioners for new patients. These practitioners historically have been primary care physicians and orthopedic surgeons however other referral sources can provide patients including podiatrists, chiropractors, and osteopaths. One of the best ways to initiate referrals from these practitioners is to refer them to patients. Make sure when you are referring to a practitioner to put it on your company letterhead and to write the reason for referral.

## **Market to past patients**

Past patients are much more likely to return to your office for additional services. Here are a few beneficial ways to market to past patients

- Email campaigns

- Follow up on the status of their past injury. This can be as simple as asking “how is your knee doing?” which can be duplicated in a mass email.
- Email past patients an announcement that you are now offering telehealth services
- Send a useful monthly newsletter to past patients. This can cover a variety of different topics including
  - Injury prevention for seasonal activities such as skiing, hiking, biking, and running
  - How to self-screen for musculoskeletal disorders and when patients should seek an examination
  - Staff updates and clinic changes
  - Explanation of common diagnoses, make sure to use layman terms with pictures

### **Market to current patients**

Some of the most powerful referrals are from word of mouth. Ask the patients that have already been successful with telehealth if any they know of anyone in need of similar services. Additionally, testimonials of patients who have had a good experience with telehealth services can be impactful on your website, google, yelp, and Facebook pages. If you are planning to approach a patient to solicit a referral make sure that the patient has had a good experience.

### **Market directly to consumers**

In the past, many clinicians have relied on physician referrals. While it’s good to make strong relationships within the medical community, marketing directly to consumers can be a large (and often new!) revenue stream. There are extensive courses on how to directly market to consumers. One of the best places to start is learning how to leverage, google and Facebook advertisements. In fact, in a 2015 study, Facebook was determined to have a significant influence on people’s purchasing decision making.<sup>6</sup>

### **Market armed with Data**

Evidence points to the use of data enriched marketing in many different sectors of business. For example: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, and many tech giants

employ hundreds and thousands of specialists to provide the most enticing and precise marketing to you as possible. How do they do it? They use data. They know if you are interested in pets, or cars, or the outdoors. While data-based marketing can be a separate course one key metric stands out above the others in healthcare. NPS scores or Net Promoter Scores serve as a holy grail of determining a customer's loyalty. It serves to benefit practices to collect and utilize NPS scores and market to their past patients that have a positive feeling towards experiences with them.

## Section 2: Summary

The operational needs to successfully perform telehealth visits depends on the type of clinic and practitioners method of practice. When starting to offer telehealth services it is best to research various virtual conference platforms, HEP video libraries and apps, electronic medical record platforms, and personal technology needs. Additionally, to initiate telehealth services marketing to current and past patients along with directly to consumers. Medical allies that will help to drive new patients include the medical community and wellness practitioners. Lastly, over the past several years sharp increases in data-driven marketing practices by utilizing Google, Facebook, and other web-based services have helped to target marketing campaigns.

## Section 2: Key Concepts

- To start telehealth services research and invest in virtual video conference platforms, HEP video libraries and apps, EMR services, and personal technology needs.
- Consider the use of support staff to reduce personal strain and improve customer service.
- Use data-based marketing campaigns to approach current and past patients along with medical community members and general consumers to have a consistent flow of new patients.

## Section 2: Key Terms

- **Electronic medical records (EMR):** A web-based service which allows for documentation of medical appointments and examination findings.
- **Net promoter score (NPS):** A metric used to determine the loyalty of a patient or customer

- **Cryotherapy:** the use of cold or ice as a treatment technique
- **Thermotherapy:** the use of heat or warmth as a treatment technique

## Section 2: Case Study

### Case Study 2a

Dr. Smith is getting ready for a new patient telehealth physical therapy evaluation. The patient is a 68-year-old male who made an appointment for R knee pain. Dr. Smith's office scheduled the new patient several weeks ago, took the patient's basic information, past medical history, and had him complete a LEFS (lower extremity functional scale). The patient calls the office 5 minutes prior to the appointment to ask how telehealth rehabilitation works and they said that Dr. Smith would email the patient a link to connect for their appointment.

- What virtual platform, HEP video service, and EMR would you suggest Dr. Smith's office use?
- What could Dr. Smith and/or his office do to improve this new patient's experience with telehealth rehabilitation?

### Case Study 2b

Dr. Fry has recently had a dramatic drop of in-person visits due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. He has become interested in starting telemedicine services to patients to help improve his patient census and continue to help patients achieve their rehab goals.

- What are three marketing campaigns Dr. Fry can start to get more telehealth patients?

## Section 2: Personal Reflection Question

Healthcare has seen a dramatic drop in patient visits due to COVID-19 and the reluctance of patients and practitioners towards in-person care. Historically, many physical therapists have made strong relationships with physicians that refer new patients. However, with medical visits at an all-time low, physical therapists have seen a drop in referrals. Should physical therapists continue to market to their physician colleagues for referrals and build stronger and/or new relationships OR continue to grow utilizing direct to consumer marketing campaigns? What would the downstream impacts on the profession of physical therapy be of directly marketing to consumers and having consistent patients that were not referred by physicians?

## Section 3: Patient Engagement and Retention

Bringing the patient in the door for their first appointment is essential. Without new patients, clinicians will never be able to help anyone and even more practices will go out of business. However, often overlooked, patient engagement is critical to a successful rehabilitation process and practice.

### Setting the scene for having successful visits

Having a staff member (or clinician) send the patient instructions prior to their first appointment. Instruct patients to

- Use a strong WIFI connection
- Test the audio/video on their computer
- Dress appropriately with a clear view of the injury
- Select a location that enables them to move themselves to clearly view needed aspects of ROM strength and functional movements
- Test the link of the virtual video conference
- Select a quiet place without distractions
- Download any apps or virtual platforms needed prior to the appointment

### Special considerations for the clinician

Just as it is important for the patient to be ready for their telehealth appointment it's also important, if not more important, for the clinician to be well prepared. As many practitioners provide telehealth from remote locations such as the comfort of their homes it is essential to remember they are conducting a medical visit with an actual patient whose health will be positively or negatively impacted as a result of their actions. Beyond the clinician being cognizant of their technological connectivity additional factors must be considered.

- Professional attire is essential to the patient experience. Patients want to be treated by someone that looks the part. If their new clinician appears unkempt in clothes they would not associate with a physical therapist it will be hard for them to envision that person being the person helping them recover from an injury.



- Work from home distractions can detract from patient engagement. Whether it is having small children, a noisy dog, spouse, or roommates it can be hard to remain focused on patients.
- Camera angles while using video conferences are essential for the patient to clearly see their clinician. Placing your webcam or video at eye level ensures shadows aren't cast over one's face or shown from an odd angle.
- Video presence is a large factor when considering virtual appointments. For example, you may be a large supporter of the current president's administration but having a political banner on your wall behind you during a video conference can not only be distracting but can be potentially off-putting for patients.

### **Engagement during the initial examination**

The best time to create patient engagement is during a patient's initial examination. Several key factors exist when engaging patients during an initial evaluation. Two of the most important factors include developing rapport and empathizing with why the patient is seeking PT services. Additionally, it is extremely important to provide the patient with information on clinical findings. Clinicians should explain to the patient their diagnosis, what to expect from their plan of care and how the patient will reach their rehabilitation goals. Go into detail regarding treatments or tools that will be used in the rehabilitation process and how those will directly improve the patient's symptoms. Some of these treatments may include corrective exercises. It's vital that the patient learns how to do their home exercise programs to be successful in telehealth treatment. Some of the emerging evidence points to the implementation of videos for patients to learn corrective exercises. Orient the patient to the videos and explain how they will be impactful in the recovery process. Additionally, provide appropriate patient expectations as to their projected outcomes and the frequency and duration of their plan of care.

### **Follow up visits and patient retention**

Patient retention can be directly linked to the patient's impression of the initial evaluation and whether they think the practitioner will help them in recovery. However, each follow-up visit is an opportunity for the patient to evaluate whether they want to continue in their course of care. One of the most important factors in patient retention is the patient feeling that they are making continual progress towards their recovery goals. This can be achieved in several ways. One way is to update patients on their progress in relation to the plan of care. While each patient is different, evidence points to clinicians providing a synopsis of their current progress at the conclusion of each appointment.

However, not all patients improve their symptoms. Still provide those patients with an update to their progress and provide referrals if necessary. Lastly, keep continual engagement with the patients HEP. If patients are adherent to their HEP they are more likely to be engaged in treatment and improve. Lastly, Telehealth also allows the physical therapist to assess the patient in their home setting.

### **Section 3: Summary**

Patient engagement and retention are so closely linked when delivering telehealth services. To have successful telehealth visits it's important to give the patient clear instructions on how to prepare for the appointment including testing their WIFI, audio, video, downloading the appropriate apps and virtual platforms, appropriate clothing, and having enough space to perform needed movements. Additionally, clinicians need to consider their professional attire, home environment, video presence, and background noise when talking with patients. Lastly, the initial examination and subsequent follow-up visits are excellent times to engage patients. To do this provide patient education, updates on progress, and open discussion about treatment.

### **Section 3: Key Concepts**

- Provide the patient instructions prior to their telehealth appointment to make for a seamless visit.
- Clinicians should wear professional attire, use a private workspace and keep a professional video presence.
- Initial examinations are essential to build patient engagement and patient loyalty
- Follow up appointments are excellent opportunities to provide patients with updates on their progress and adjust their plan of care.

### **Section 3: Key Terms**

- **WIFI:** Wireless internet
- **ROM:** Range of motion

### **Section 3: Case Study**

Dr. Bateman has a follow-up telehealth physical therapy appointment in which he is treating a 33-year-old male patient with PFPS in their R knee. Dr. Bateman and his patient log onto the patient portal, Dr. Bateman's image appears similar to the picture

below and the patient can't hear what he is saying. How could Dr. Bateman improve his video conference to have a more professional presence and better telehealth appointment?



### **Section 3: Personal Reflection Question**

As we see work from home culture becoming increasingly more common where is the line between professional and personal home life?

### **Section 4: Telehealth compliance and considerations**

#### **Compliance**

During the COVID-19 crisis and the rise of telehealth services, many are looking to start telehealth services immediately. However, it is important to consider the best legal practices. While Telehealth services can provide better access to healthcare for patients and potentially open additional revenue streams for clinicians it is important to perform the proper due diligence and learn the necessary laws and regulations. While many laws can be state-specific it is always best to consult with a legal professional. Included are several considerations to make when starting a telehealth practice from new patient paperwork to physical therapy practice management software.

#### **New patient paperwork**

Patient forms are a part of every clinicians daily practice. While some forms used for in-person services others may need minor changes when starting a telehealth service.

Past medical history forms don't need significant adjustment but think about any additional questions to ask a telehealth patient since. Some of the topics practitioners have been including are

- Questions about bruising with some asking for clear pictures or images from patients
- Medical screening question on cognitive abilities.
- Questions regarding medical stability.
  - Have you taken a fall in the last 7 days?
  - Have you had an episode of loss of consciousness (LOC) over the past 30 days?
  - Do you use an assistive device?
  - Do you currently have a caregiver? If so, will they be attending appointments?

**Functional outcome measures** or outcome measures are standardized patient subjective questionnaires assessing one functional capabilities. Some telehealth clinicians have been following a trend to add additional questions for patients to determine their candidacy for telehealth services and functional ability level.

**Telehealth consent** specific to virtual appointments, patients must specifically consent to not only all medical care but specifically telehealth services. There are many good resources online to find telehealth consent forms. According to WebPT and the APTA, telehealth consent forms should specifically mention the patient's risk to privacy and health information security. Additionally, it should be noted that patients are able to withdraw their consent at any time they wish during the treatment process. Lastly, while a generic telehealth consent form may suffice for your practice and operational needs each clinician and practice are different and it is advised to seek counsel from a legal representative in order to secure the form that works best for your specific needs.

### **HIPAA and Patient Privacy with software**

When selecting an EMR platform and telehealth video platform consider their protections against privacy breaches and protections for patient privacy. During the COVID-19 crisis, the HHS Office of Civil Rights (OCS) has given providers discretion of providing "good faith" telehealth services through everyday communication platforms.

Therefore, at the time this was written (September, 2020) providers have the ability to use services such as Facetime, Google Hangouts, or Zoom. However, when assessing a video platform it is essential to consider performing a comprehensive risk assessment. While there is not a specific process or guidance as to how to perform a comprehensive risk assessment. HHS states it must include:

- “Identify and document potential threats and vulnerabilities;
- Assess current security measures;
- Determine the likelihood of threat occurrence;
- Determine the potential impact of threat occurrence;
- Determine the level of risk; and
- Finalize documentation.”

Additionally, a comprehensive risk assessment can include questions for the telehealth vendor including questions asking

- Does it encrypt data?
- Does it audit and monitor its systems?
- Does it have a named information security officer?
- Does it have privacy and security policies in place?

### **Liability and malpractice**

Medical liability and malpractice is an additional concern when starting telehealth services. There are many aspects of malpractice that are helpful to investigate prior to initiating care. Specifically, whether you as a provider are covered and protected by your malpractice insurance to deliver telehealth services. Contact your insurance carrier or broker and ask about their coverage for telehealth. Questions regarding coverage of medical malpractice, lack of informed consent, and privacy or security breaches are important items to discuss with your broker. Additionally, if you are a practice owner inquire whether your employees or contractors will need separate coverage beyond what you provide.

### **Practitioner privacy**

While it is not legally binding for practitioners to keep their personal information such as phone numbers, email, and or usernames confidential from patients it is an important consideration to make while delivering services. Clinicians are encouraged to evaluate the type of relationship they would like to have with patients. If you are comfortable with a patient approaching you via text or informal means it may be best to share your personal contact information. However, if you would rather patients call your office or not directly contact you it is best to keep your information private. Current trends include keeping phone numbers, emails, and personal contact information confidential. The use of a separate patient designated phone number or utilizing Google Voice helps maintain practitioner privacy confidential. It is generally accepted to provide patients with an email address. Email addresses are usually shared with patients, but this does not need to be a personal internal email rather than a patient designated address. Lastly, since many practitioners will be delivering services from the comfort of their home it's important to remember that patients will have a small insight into their personal living space. It is recommended to select a private room to hold services but be mindful that personal styling decor and home life can be a factor.

### **Documentation**

Documentation becomes very important for telehealth visits. Since practitioners can not perform hands-on assessments, telehealth evaluations are increasingly dependent on subjective patient reporting to make clinical decisions. Make sure to document what patients report, objective findings, and include in your assessment the reason for your clinical judgment based on these findings.

### **Licensure requirements**

Both practitioners and patients must be located, at the time of treatment, in a state that the practitioner holds an active license. While patients and clinicians can be in separate states during the delivery of services they must be located in a state where the practitioner holds a license. Compact licensure is new legislation that provides clinicians privileges in multiple states. Check your local laws to see if your state is eligible for compact licensure.

### **Patient satisfaction**

Without in-person interactions with patients, it can be harder to develop patient rapport. Pay close attention to patient satisfaction and track NPS metrics. According to Medbridge7 there are five key factors in developing rapport with a patient during telehealth appointments.

- Maintain good eye contact - Keep your camera located where you are looking at the patient. Don't consistently look off to the side or up towards your monitor as it can be distracting for patients.
- Maintain professional appearance - As mentioned previously it is important to keep professional appearances. Do not take appointments in a hoodie or casual clothing and be mindful of background distractions.
- Maximize your set up - Make sure to use a quiet space, good camera angle, fast internet connection, and seamless video conference platform. Pay special attention to the patient's ability to clearly see the video image presented, avoid backlighting or dark spaces to conduct telehealth appointments.
- Leverage technology - While telehealth appointments can be difficult to build patient rapport practitioners can also leverage the use of technology to better serve patients. Consider providing patients with links to pictures and videos while explaining patient education and provide home exercise program videos. Lastly, these patients are excellent candidates to enroll in the use of apps and web-based applications such as MedBridgeGo which can track progress with corrective exercises and vital patient data.
- Use established face to face communication - Each clinician should pretend that the patient they are seeing via telehealth is in their office right in front of them. Use the same engaging face to face communication skills via video conference. Clinicians should perform active listening, refrain from interrupting patients and be empathic towards patient concerns.

## **Payment**

The easiest and fastest way to being paid is through a cash-based practice. However, this often results in fewer patients that can afford or utilize services. Insurance reimbursement is dependent on specific state laws and specific practice guidelines. While these laws are changing at an alarming rate it is important to note that trends are emerging that payers are covering telehealth services.

## **Section 4: Summary**

Telehealth services come with an extensive list of compliance and special considerations. When rendering services remember to collect the necessary legal paperwork for patients including past medical history, consent, and functional outcome measures.

Additionally, special attention should be given to patient privacy and HIPPA compliance when selecting appropriate EMR services and virtual video conference platforms. Furthermore, clinicians should be careful with their exposure to malpractice and legal issues, make sure to contact your insurance provider to inquire if you are covered to render telehealth services and check if there is any special documentation or licensure requirements. Lastly, focus on patient satisfaction with services, utilize technology and telehealth to better patient outcomes and perform active communication to engage patients.

#### **Section 4: Key Concepts**

- Patients need to complete forms regarding past medical history, consent, and functional outcome measures.
- It can be challenging to keep patient privacy confidential during telehealth appointments, give special attention to the privacy and HIPPA compliance of EMR services and video platforms.
- Clinicians should investigate their exposure to malpractice claims and check to make sure their insurance covers performing telehealth services.
- Clinicians need to check their state licensure and maintain licensure in the same state as the patient receives services.

#### **Section 4: Key Terms**

- **Past medical history:** Information collected, usually via survey, about patients' medical past.
- **Consent form:** A waiver that the patient signs to agree to partake in services acknowledging the risk of treatment.
- **Compact licensure:** Privileges to expand a practitioners licensure to multiple states where legislation allows.

#### **Section 4: Case Study**

Dr. Chan is a physical therapist performing telehealth from his home office for a patient that is on vacation in Europe. He lives with his wife and infant child. Dr. Chan has difficulty connecting with his patient over the HIPPA approved patient portal and decides to use Facetime to connect with them. At the same time, his wife enters his home office



to change their child's diaper in a clear view of the patient. The patient is clearly offended by Dr. Chan's actions and suggest they reschedule their appointment.

- Identify the compliance violations Dr. Chan has committed
- How could Dr. Chan correct these violations?

## Section 4: Personal Reflection Question

Physical therapists are increasingly dealing with insurance denials of services which leads many of them to switch to cash-based practices. Is it ethical for physical therapists to have cash-only practices? What are the downstream impacts of this on the profession?

### Self Learning Activities (optional)

Practice a telehealth appointment with a friend or family member. If possible evaluate a real musculoskeletal disorder they have been having. Pretend as if they are an actual patient by sending them all the pre-visit paperwork and taking them through a complete evaluation and documenting your findings.

- Write down the aspects of the visit that were difficult or need practice.
- Make a list of things you need to improve.

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