

## Lights, Camera, Telehealth! Episode 6 Telemedicine Trends and Considerations

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Providers are increasingly expanding their telemedicine offerings in response to stakeholder pressures, changing reimbursement options, and technological advances. Types of visits that are commonly offered via telemedicine include:

- Routine visits (common conditions & minor ailments)
- Chronic care management
- Follow-ups
- Telepsychiatry
- Telestroke

These visits tend to be lower acuity, routine visits where a provider's expertise and opinion are required, but the provider's physical presence is not necessary. In the specific case of telestroke, a remote visit provides a timely specialty consult to improve overall outcomes. These virtual consults and assessments allow providers to see more patients and add a level of convenience for both the provider and the patient.

Organizations report offering telehealth services in the following specialty areas:<sup>1</sup>

Clinical Area	Adoption Rate
Stroke	79%
Mental and Behavioral Health	58%
Primary Care	50%
Urgent Care	33%
Emergency Room	38%
Dermatology	21%

As telemedicine continues to grow and further develops as a field in healthcare, there are many trends to monitor. A few to follow include:

- **Artificial intelligence** – With the quantity of data available to be mined, artificial intelligence is being tested as a means of predicting and preventing illness. In cancer treatment, providers and researchers are using algorithms to choose the best treatment plans for patients. In the acute care setting, artificial intelligence helps clinicians predict which hospitalized patients are at risk for an acute event, allowing providers to intervene and prevent the patient from ever needing to be transferred to the ICU. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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<sup>1</sup> "Top of Mind for Top U.S. Health Systems 2018." *Center for Connected Medicine*. <https://connectedmed.com/topofmind2018>. Accessed July 2018.

- **Wearables** – Last year, U.S. adults used nearly 77 million wearable devices.<sup>2</sup> While the technology is still being refined and positioned for use in healthcare, the aim is to manage chronic disease and gather data. “Smart” watches are increasingly including health features such as stress level monitoring, step and activity counts, and heart rate monitoring. “Smart” phones now include continuous glucose monitors for the diabetic population using Bluetooth.
- **Security** – In a world where data breaches are a concern for every organization, healthcare or not, cybersecurity and protection of patient privacy will be crucial to monitor as telemedicine develops. HIPAA applies. Challenges will include protecting individual devices, ensuring devices accurately identify the patient, encrypting and protecting the connection and data transfer, and safely storing any data.

An organization’s telemedicine strategy will vary depending on its specific needs, constraints and priorities and the needs of its service area. Strategies can range from offensive to defensive and may include utilizing telehealth as a clinical outcome differentiator, a complement to provider supply, a contingency service offering, a method of right-sizing services, or any combination of strategies that fit the mission and needs of the organization.

In developing your organization’s telemedicine strategy, it is essential to conduct a thorough internal assessment to identify gaps and opportunities as well as cultural and resource impediments. It is also critical to recognize that the technology, payment and regulatory environments are rapidly evolving and require ongoing evaluation and constant striving to improve. Telemedicine offers significant opportunities and that should be explored and embraced as a part of any healthcare organization’s strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> Crucius, Stefanie. “Wearable Tech is Here to Stay with a Robust Presence in the Future Healthcare Industry.” Published June 4, 2018. <https://www.wearable-technologies.com/2018/06/wearable-tech-is-here-to-stay-with-a-robust-presence-in-the-future-healthcare-industry/>. Accessed July 2018.