

Telehealth/Telemedicine

Question

When adding or expanding telehealth services in a healthcare practice, what important factors should practice leadership and providers consider?

Answer

Telehealth, also commonly called telemedicine, refers to the delivery of healthcare services and information via electronic communications. The exchange of information can occur in real time, or data can be forwarded and analyzed later. Telehealth includes consultative, diagnostic, treatment, and educational services.

Telehealth is subject to both federal and state regulations, including HIPAA, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' rules, Drug Enforcement Administration regulations, and state licensing requirements.

When considering whether to implement or expand telehealth services, ask your personal attorney to assist you in reviewing the following items:

- State licensing practice act(s), telehealth regulations, and privacy laws:
 - What are the licensure requirements in the state where the patient resides?
 - Is a face-to-face evaluation with the patient required?
 - What are the requirements for prescribing medications as part of telehealth?
 - How do state privacy laws compare with HIPAA requirements?
- Telehealth equipment (interactive audio and video):
 - Does the telehealth equipment company require routine access to protected health information (PHI)?

- If yes, your practice and the equipment vendor should have a [business associate agreement](#) (BAA) in place.
- If no, does the equipment qualify for a [BAA exception](#) (e.g., a conduit exception)? If it does, you can use the equipment if a risk assessment confirms that reasonable and addressable security is in place. Make sure to document the risk assessment.
- Does the FDA regulate the telemetry software or device?
- Did you test the equipment before purchasing it? For example, does your organization have adequate bandwidth for videos and images? Do videos and images have adequate resolution?
- Does your practice have a back-up plan in case of equipment failure?
- Written patient selection criteria and guidelines. Do selection criteria and guidelines consider:
 - Complexity of treatment?
 - The patient's ability to acquire and use electronic equipment?
 - The healthcare provider's ability to refer the patient to a local healthcare provider?
 - Clinical algorithms for emergency treatment, referrals, coordination of care with other healthcare providers, and communication of critical results?
- Informed consent:
 - Are the risks and benefits of telehealth discussed with patients and documented in their health records?
 - Does the informed consent discussion include:
 - Limitations of the technology (e.g., it may not replicate a face-to-face assessment, emergency treatment cannot be provided, etc.)?
 - Potential for transmission failure, which may require an in-person meeting or a rescheduled video consult?
 - Potential for privacy/security issues, even with current security protocols?
 - Consent to communicate?

- Marketing/advertising:
 - Is marketing/advertising for telehealth services compliant with Federal Trade Commission rules, state regulations, and state medical board requirements?

Other important factors to consider when developing a telehealth program include patient access (appointments, etc.), documentation of telehealth services, credentialing of healthcare providers, electronic prescribing services, referrals and consultations, supervision of allied health professionals, reimbursement, and ongoing changes to state and federal regulations.

Additionally, professional liability insurance coverage is an important factor. An insurance agent or broker can help answer questions about coverage for telehealth activities. If you do not have one, contact MedPro Group at 1-800-463-3776 and ask for assistance with this coverage issue.

Learn More

The Department of Health and Human Services offers guidance and resources on its [Getting Started With Telehealth](#) webpage. For curated resources on telehealth, see MedPro Group's [Risk Resources: Telehealth/Telemedicine](#).

This document does not constitute legal or medical advice and should not be construed as rules or establishing a standard of care. Because the facts applicable to your situation may vary, or the laws applicable in your jurisdiction may differ, please contact your attorney or other professional advisors if you have any questions related to your legal or medical obligations or rights, state or federal laws, contract interpretation, or other legal questions.

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