

AdvancedMD

*The Human Side of Telemedicine*

*Wowing Patients*

**& IMPROVING  
OUTCOMES**

*THROUGH PEOPLE-CENTERED  
TECHNOLOGY*

COVID-19 Special Edition



For many practices, the steep learning curve of implementing telehealth (telemedicine) technology has been surmounted, with a healthy push from COVID-19. As it turns out, that was actually the easy part. The next big challenge?

Making telehealth work for patients, providers and staff alike in a way that improves trust, efficiencies, profitability and outcomes. These aspirations all involve humans - hence the difficulty. In this eBook we share practical human-centered approaches from experts and practices in the telehealth trenches to help you avoid some of the people-related blind spots that prevent practices from making telehealth something all humans can smile about.



## WHICH WAY TELEMEDICINE?

As the COVID saga continues to unfold, the sorting process will determine which elements of the rapidly-built response infrastructure will remain a permanent part of our workplaces and culture. It will also determine which will be retired as having served their temporary emergency service. Nowhere is this more sharply focused than in healthcare.

Opening a discussion on the human side of telehealth may seem fruitless if telemedicine ends up in the 'flash-in-the-pan' category that fades to the sidelines once the pandemic is past. While there are many angles to consider, a growing consensus in the industry is that telehealth is not only here to stay, but that it will become a mainstream part of healthcare delivery going forward.

Consider these recent developments:

After languishing as an interesting potential future delivery option for years, telehealth rocketed to the forefront in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, shortening a typical 10+ year adoption cycle literally into weeks.

Reimbursement policies followed in step on the same fast-track trajectory, removing one of the major barriers to rapid physician adoption.

A recent survey found that as a result of the COVID-19 impact, nearly one-half of all practicing physicians in the US are now offering some type of telehealth option, up from only 18% in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

A growing consensus among experts and users alike is that telemedicine will become a mainstream care delivery mode, even once the pandemic has passed.<sup>2,3</sup>

## UP AND RUNNING

With so much emphasis on telemedicine during the pandemic, it has become easier than ever to get telemedicine running in a practice. Resources, guides, options and solutions, both free and for-hire, are readily available from trusted sources and vendors. While

installing the technology and backend systems is a major short-term project, following well-established best practices can dramatically reduce the time and expense curve for implementation. Forward-thinking practices look beyond merely bolting on telehealth as an add-on

service, and move toward making it a seamless, integral part of their existing systems and workflows. See the eBook [Telehealth: The Ultimate Guide to Maximizing Revenue, Keeping More of What You're Paid, and Thriving Through Thick and Thin](#) for more details.

# THE HUMAN SIDE OF TELEMEDICINE: *THE WOW FACTOR*

An optimized telehealth system includes two complementary pieces:

**The technology side.** Software, equipment, connection to other systems, reporting, billing, workflow, etc. Everything required to get the system ‘up-and-running.’

**The human side.** How the system is used, and ultimately, how successful it is in helping humans be more productive, effective and better served.

As noted earlier, nearly any practice today can piece together the required up-and-running technologies to onboard a telehealth solution. Unfortunately, this is where many practices stop. They are up-and-running, so they shift to off-and-running mode under the assumption they are done.

The reality is they are only halfway done and may be missing out on the greatest potential benefits telehealth has to offer – the opportunity to truly wow patients and earn their trust and commitment long-term. Focusing on the human side of the solution delivers time and money savings, improves accuracy and gives patients and staff a much better experience than merely installing new technology. This is where telehealth really starts to deliver its greatest value.

## Two Unique Points of View

To keep human optimizing efforts simple and insightful, it’s best to focus separately on the two major groups of humans impacted by a telehealth system: patients and staff (including providers). Doing so helps more clearly identify potential problems and improvements by seeing things through the eyes of each group’s unique experience.



## PATIENTS

Telemedicine usage needs to be intuitive for patients. Remember, this type of doctor-patient interaction is new for patients as well. Many will be anxious and unsure. Many could get confused. The simpler and more intuitive you can make the experience, the more at ease and confident patients will be in having a pleasant, stress-free visit with their doctor.

### Patient Walkthrough

To create the best patient experience, practices should always think empathically: think like the patient. One of the most effective ways to do this is to conduct a thorough walkthrough as if you were the patient experiencing your own practice’s telehealth experience and services – from scheduling, intake forms, reminders, cop-pay capture, and all the way through the actual visit.

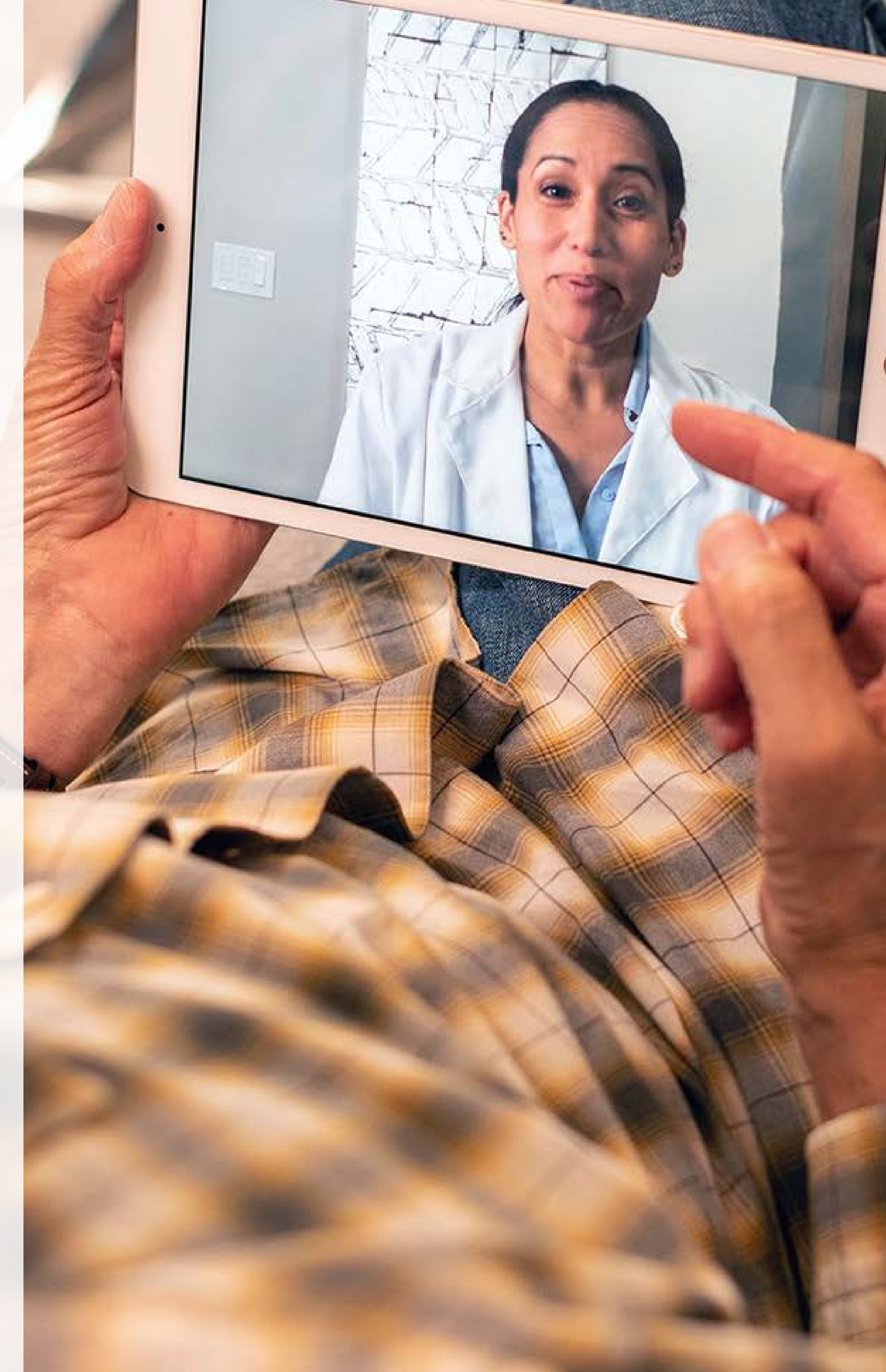
Take off your provider hat and your techie hat, put on your non-tech-savvy patient hat, and walk through the entire process from that point of view. You will be amazed at how differently things can look from the outside looking in rather than the other way around.

Make careful notes about your experience: what was simple and

easy to understand; what was confusing or unclear; what had to be repeated multiple times; what was intimidating and potentially embarrassing; what was rushed; what was redundant; etc.

It’s best to have several different people in the practice play the patient role so you can get different points of view. Take several passes through the process, and explore all different entry, exit, and touch points in between.

Then, share and compile your experiences and identify areas for improvement. In that process, maintain a patient-focused mindset, and continually ask the question, “How will this decision impact my patients and their experience with me?”



Here is a short checklist of items to consider in your walkthrough. Many more items should become apparent as you get into the process:

#### Online scheduling experience

Can you find yourself online and schedule an appointment? Does a Google search show you offer telehealth services and connect patients to your online scheduler?

Does your online scheduling process make it clear that telemedicine is a visit option?

Is the telemedicine visit option clearly differentiated from other types (e.g. color, checkbox or another identifier)?

Are telemedicine visit hours accurate and synchronized for changes to provider availability?

Is the telemedicine visit incorporated into the automated reminder system? Is the automated reminder customized to clearly explain that this is a telehealth visit and not in-office?

#### Confirmation message content

Did you receive a confirmation message (email, text or voice) for your successful schedule request?

Did the message state it came from your practice and address the person by name? Did it include simple instructions on how to access the upcoming session? Did it include the visit date and time?

Did the message include a calendar invite/ appointment reminder?

Did the message include instructions to complete intake/ consent forms from your patient portal?

Was there a simple one-click visit initiation to start the video session?

Was there information about text, chat or phone support for glitches or for those who are confused or tech-challenged?

Are communication options available in multiple languages and automated?

#### Visit and post-visit experience

During the session login process (preferably before the session starts) or after the session at checkout, are co-pay amounts presented properly? Could you pay online with a credit or debit card? Could you see your outstanding balance for past charges and make an additional payment?

Did you make available prescription and orders instructions? Did you see the preferred pharmacy for prescriptions? Could you make changes?

Could you capture accurate charges in a familiar EHR or billing system? Did your telehealth visit show up on your regular statement with in-person visits and not separate for the telehealth visit?

## LEVERAGE SURVEYS AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Another important piece of input to this process is obviously direct feedback from patients. This is most easily gathered through automated online survey tools, the best of which are directly integrated into the practice management system and triggered off of the visit checkout process. The great news is that these tools also include an online reputation management function, making it easy for patients to post positive reviews on popular social media review sites (e.g. Google Reviews). So, you get direct feedback about the patient's most recent visit plus a positive boost for online reputation, all with little or no direct staff intervention. For telehealth, set the system up to automatically send a survey to telehealth patients following a completion of the visit, and include telehealth-specific questions regarding those areas you are focused on.

## PROVIDERS AND STAFF

To deliver optimized service efficiently and cost-effectiveness, telemedicine administration must be intuitive for staff and providers. Here again, an empathic approach – putting yourself in the shoes of a pressured staff member on a busy day – is one of the best approaches for identifying potential areas of improvement.

However, it is more difficult to be objective in this exercise, since it is often your own job and workflow you are evaluating, and it's easy to fall into patterns of workarounds, manually filling technology gaps, and heuristics that inevitably creep into getting through a busy day.

To combat this, try the new trainee mindset. Imagine you are walking a newly hired staff member through the telehealth workflow and process. Explain and demonstrate each step. As before, make notes of when you are explaining things that seem tedious, redundant, confusing, manual, or time-consuming.

It is also helpful to evaluate the process both from the sub-segment level (see examples in the list below), and from an end-to-end experience level. This can help ensure not only human-optimized interaction with individual tasks, but also avoid the silo effect of, "my job is done, throw it over the wall" handoffs.

Here is a starter list of human element items to evaluate from the staff/provider perspective. You should expand this list as you discover more items in your own system:

Are telemedicine visits easily and intuitively integrated into the scheduling system, both phone and online? Is provider availability automatically updated to indicate open times for telehealth visits? Do patients have to chase down provider schedules separately?

Are telehealth reminders integrated into the core automated reminder system? Do reminders include telehealth-specific instructions that are clear and avoid additional calls and staff intervention?

Onboarding new patients: are telehealth visits incorporated into the portal onboarding workflow, including reminders/follow-up prior to the first visit?

What are the checkout and payment workflows for following up after the visit where the patient isn't physically walking out of the clinic? How is staff alerted to initiate this process?

Are visit charting, prescribing and orders integrated into the EHR, or are staff/providers manually working around a separate system?

Are telemedicine codes current in the billing system, and attached to the charge capture (superbill or charge slip) process? Are billing code changes updated automatically as part of regular billing code updates?

Are telehealth follow-up instructions and requests to staff included in the internal messaging/task management workflow?

Is there training and staffing for telehealth support for confused/non-technical patients, e.g. calls, chat, etc. There will be people who need assistance getting on the call, camera, sound, etc. Who is trained and knowledgeable to field these questions? How does this impact staffing schedules and other internal resources?

## THE ONE THING

Once you've run through the checklist and modified the process to your own workflow, you should be able to have a very honed process that is patient friendly. Take another walkthrough and ask, "If we could change one thing to make this experience really stellar for patients, what would it be?" You may find that a simple tweak here or there can make a noticeable difference in patients' perception of your telehealth delivery. Then sit back and watch your positive online reviews soar! (Read on for tips on how to do this!)

“If we could change one thing to make this experience really stellar for patients, what would it be?”

Patient surveys and reputation management tools integrated within a practice management system can drive real-time feedback and business insights with little to know effort.

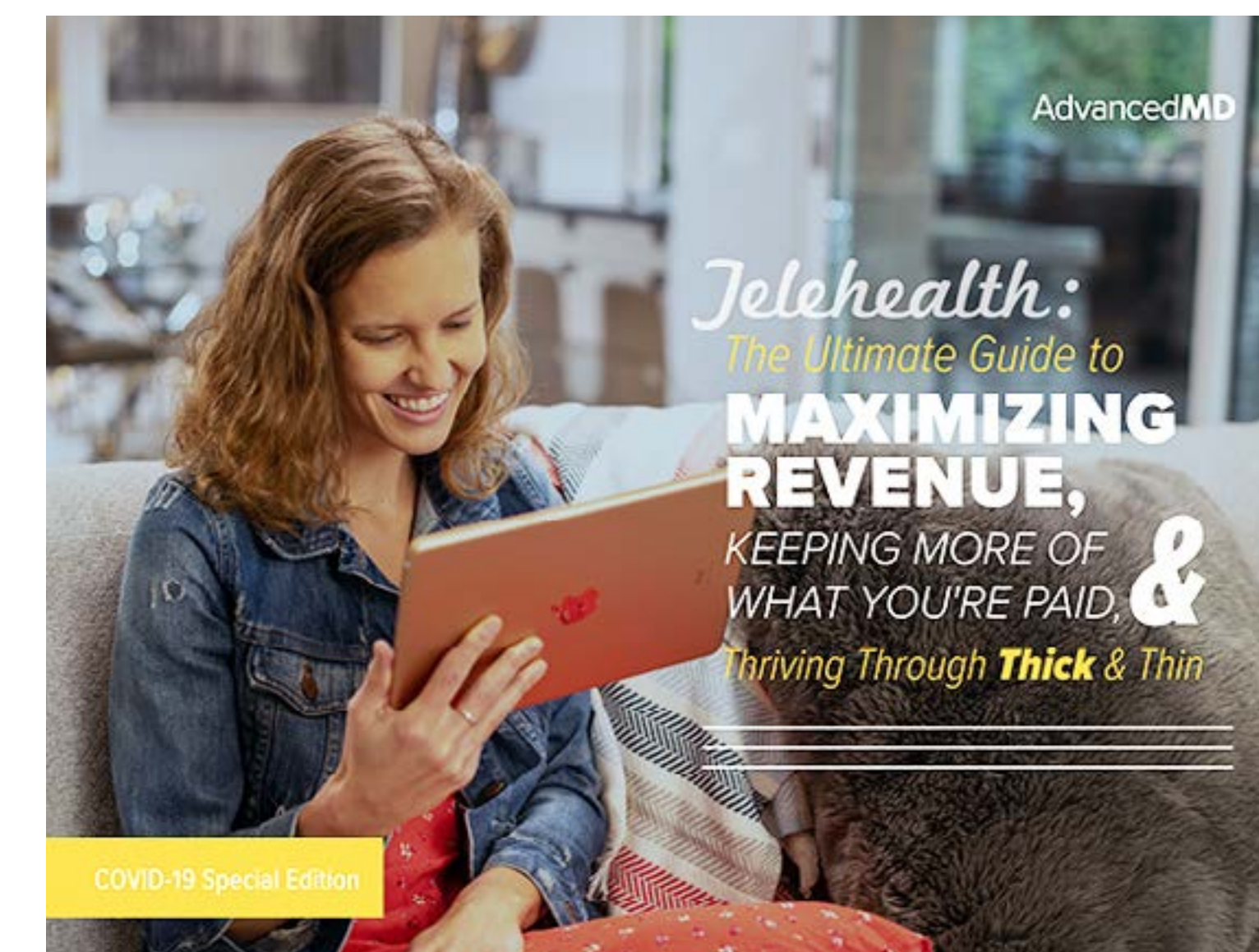
[▶ Learn more](#)



## GETTING AHEAD OF THE WOW CURVE

When properly implemented with a human-focused approach, telehealth can become not only a productive, established part of your practice service delivery, but a differentiating feature that attracts patients, wows them into coming back again, and excites them to share their experience with friends and the online world. With telehealth roaring into mainstream medical care delivery, this is an opportunity to ride the crest of the wave into patients' minds and hearts for many years to come.

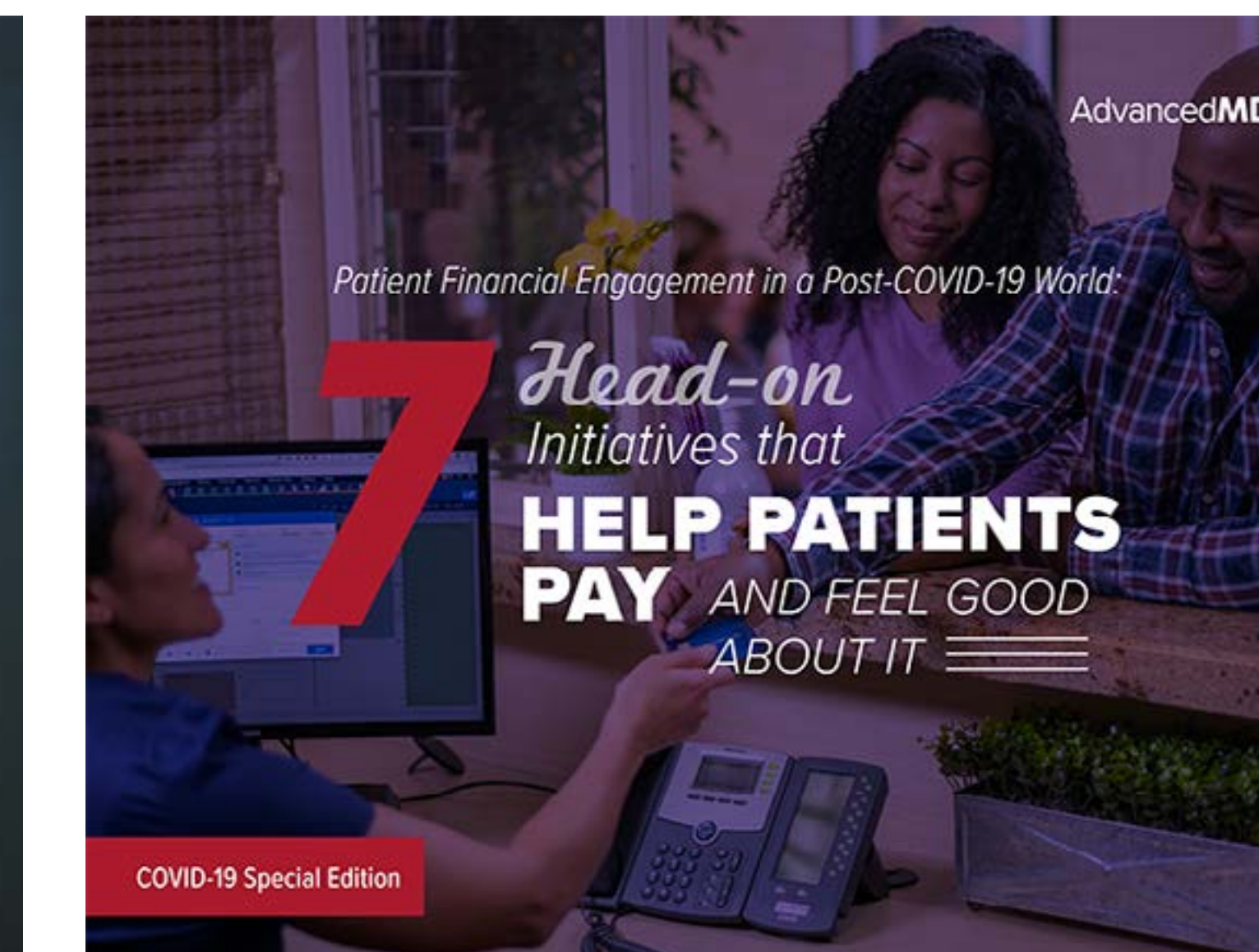
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Telehealth Maximizing Revenue Through Thick and Thin



7 Crucial Steps to Reboot Your Practice



Patient Financial Engagement in a Post-COVID-19 World



Post-COVID-19: Moving to 'Better than Normal'



Hitchhikers Guide to Managing a Sustainable Patient Mix

Our exclusive COVID-19 series of eBooks provides a foundation on how to reboot your practice following this crisis. Download these free eBooks to learn more.

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