



TELEHEALTH

for Picky Patients

5 Key Steps for Moving from Crisis Stopgap
to Patient-pleasing Convenience

Regardless of where your practice is on the
'exiting the crisis' crossroads with telehealth,
two things are increasingly clear:

1. Telehealth is firmly embedded and growing, a permanent part of healthcare delivery now and in the future.
2. The most productive approach for plotting a telehealth future trajectory in your practice is to ask, "What more do our patients perceive they need from our telehealth delivery," not, "What else should we do with telehealth?"

Saturated by highly efficient and highly appealing online interactions, patients are now frequently asking, "How easy and convenient is it to use virtual visits with this doctor, and how do they compare with other provider options?" Indeed, a growing body of research confirms that patients today most highly prize convenience and options (in the form of online reviews and ratings) in selecting healthcare services.

For more details, see the eGuide "[How to Remove the 'Hate' From Patients' Love/Hate Attitude Toward Their Doctors - 5 Proven Paths](#)".

At this point, many practices may be breathing a sigh of relief and celebrating the fact that with telehealth, they kept the doors open and the care flowing in the face of a crisis. As well they should. But in the meantime, patients are ratcheting up their demands for simple, convenient, professional virtual healthcare delivery beyond stopgap technology measures.



People First

To please patients, a good starting place is to step away from the technology and look at all the other factors that might impact a picky human's perception of the care they receive. In this guide, we've assembled some of the most powerful difference-makers that may have been overlooked in early implementation of your telehealth offering. Some of these items may seem small and subtle, but from a human perspective, they are the little touches that build confidence, trust and long-term satisfaction with discriminating patients.

These 5 steps will take some reflection, planning, and process upgrades, but can quickly and inexpensively elevate your virtual encounters to please even the pickiest patients.

Telehealth

5

Steps for
Pleasing
Picky
Patients



STEP 1

Get the Facts: Measure Patient Telehealth Satisfaction

Recent surveys show that among the 43% of practices that track patient telehealth visit satisfaction, 61% reported improved scores in the past year, with 33% showing no change. Those are very encouraging results regarding patient satisfaction overall.¹

That means, however, that 57% of practices don't measure telehealth satisfaction, and are essentially flying blind when it comes to understanding how they are doing or how to improve their approach.

The important first step toward improvement is to get beyond crisis mentality and anecdotal evidence and find out what patients like and dislike about your practice's telehealth delivery.

A good starting point is to measure these key factors that surfaced as most important in a recent JD Power study of patient experience with telehealth.²

Spending enough time to provide quality care

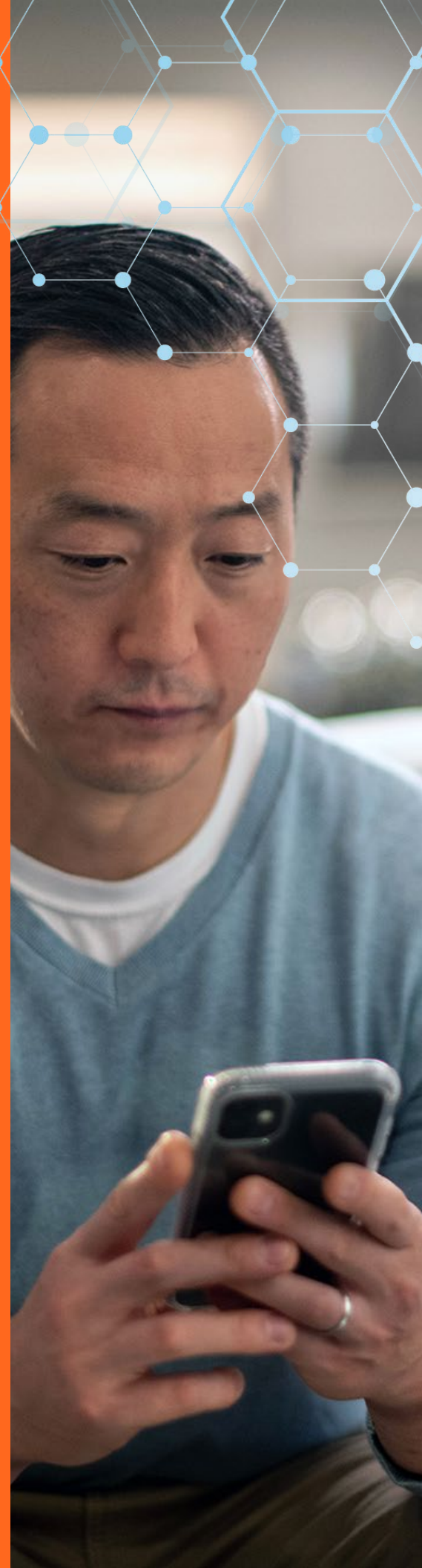
Completely resolving medical concern(s) during visit

Following up after visit

Resolving question/problem on first contact (online/messaging)

Resolving question/problem on first contact (via phone)

Questions around these key indicators can be supplemented with queries regarding important 'webside manner' components outlined below that are also major contributors to telehealth experience satisfaction.



2 STEP

Take a Big-picture, Non-crisis View

While there are still plenty of pandemic-related issues to deal with, most practices stabilizing processes and systems in place and are settling into a more predictable rhythm.

If telehealth was hurriedly installed in your practice to deal with COVID-related closures, this is a good time to step back and take a fresh strategic look at where this approach fits in your practice picture long term without the pressure of just making sure patients have some minimum level of contact.

Here are a few fundamental questions to consider:

What do we want telehealth to accomplish for our patients, and for our overall quality of care delivery?

What is the patient feedback telling us? Are there insights about our approach, usability, simplicity, or quality of visits that need to be addressed?

Are there provider issues that are popping up, either overall or on an individual provider level? Are some providers making the transition better than others? Why?

Are certain pockets of patients being better served than others? Can these be identified by a specific characteristic, e.g., visit type, diagnosis, age, etc. and addressed with customized approaches?

STEP 3

Set Clear Expectations

A big part of perceived satisfaction hinges on the expectations that are brought to the table. This is especially true of telehealth visits.

If a patient's expectations for the encounter vary significantly from the provider's and staff's, there is bound to be a mismatch that will result in patient dissatisfaction.

Many patients may not understand that a telehealth visit will include most, if not all components of a standard office visit. The evaluation will be just as thorough and complete as if they had been in the exam room. It's important for providers and staff to clearly communicate this to patients, especially on first visits. This can be done verbally, but also should be included in telehealth information on the website, in reminders for first visits, and in any staff interactions with patients.

In the patient's mind, this takes the visit out of the follow-up phone call category (which they expect for free) and puts it clearly in the structured visit category and sets the expectations for what follows.

That said, it's also important that the clinical guidelines followed for an office visit be applied to virtual visits to ensure consistent experience and perceived value.

4 STEP Improve 'Webside Manner'³

The many benefits a healthy bedside manner has on medical outcomes are well documented. Key components of a patient's positive perception of bedside manner include feeling heard, feeling that the doctor is giving them full attention and communicating clearly, and sensing the provider's compassion and empathy.



While more challenging to achieve, these same relationship builders can be effectively realized over technology by paying attention to a few important 'webside manner' fine points, including:

Telepresence. This is how you are perceived through the screen. A common mistake for many providers is misunderstanding the camera-screen alignment. Eye contact is critically important to a patient feeling heard and connected, but if the screen the provider is viewing the patient on is not in close proximity and alignment with the camera, it will appear the provider isn't looking at them and thus distracted or uninterested. It may mean training yourself to look directly at the camera rather than the image of the patient for much of your conversation.

Also beware of getting buried in the screen too long when looking at reports, images, etc. Remember to reestablish camera/eye contact as frequently as possible.

Finally, be careful about suddenly terminating the visit. Before

closing the link, double check for understanding and any unanswered questions to avoid the 'hand on the doorknob' perception.

Communication. The newness of the setting and the lack of other non-verbal cues can contribute to confusion or misunderstanding on the patient's part. For example, rather than merely holding an arm up for examination, the patient may need to adjust lighting, camera angle, clothing, etc. for proper viewing. Clearly and patiently talking them through each new experience will help them gain confidence in the virtual setting and your virtual expertise.

Additionally, instructions, next steps, follow ups, etc. may need additional explanation and repetition to ensure patients understand the virtual protocols.

Environment. While these days a telehealth visit can be securely completed from virtually anywhere, patients need to feel the same confidence they would expect in an office setting. This means dressing professionally (at least from the waist up), and paying attention to distracting lighting, background visuals and noise. Patients need to know the visit is completely confidential, and that their visit won't be overheard or interrupted.

Come Prepared. Reviewing charts, histories and notes during a virtual visit can exacerbate the perception of the provider being distracted. As much as possible, review these items in advance to remain fully engaged. If you need to read or make notes, let the patient know what you are doing by relating it to the current conversation point.



STEP

5

Make It Easy to do a Telehealth visit with You

With convenience ranking at the top of a patients' lists of what they expect from a healthcare interaction, take steps to make sure the telehealth experience with your practice is simple, easy, and convenient. Here are a few items to help ensure that outcome:

Scheduling, and changing/rescheduling telehealth visits is simple and seamless, especially from the patient portal on the web and from mobile devices. Open slots, waitlisting, provider availability, and rescheduling options for virtual visits should all be seamlessly integrated into the core scheduling system and easily distinguishable for both patient and staff. Same goes for live phone scheduling, where telehealth visits should be offered for targeted visit types and populations.

Automated reminders contain connection links and help resources for starting the visit online. Also include a checklist of pointers to make the visit productive, including tips on lighting, sound, background documents to have ready, etc.

Staff and online help documents (including phone numbers) are available to help patients troubleshoot issues they may encounter in utilizing the technology.

Onboarding documents and processes are automated and streamlined for first-time patients and are taken care of prior to the visit through automated reminders and follow up processes.

Small Adjustments, Big Impact

By stepping up seemingly subtle pieces of the human side of your telehealth interactions, patients will sense that something is different, more personalized, convenient, and pleasing.

They may not immediately identify the fact that their doctor seemed cheerier and engaged because of improved lighting, better telepresence, and removal of distracting backgrounds. But the collective impact of your practice being picky about attention to many small details will meet them at a new level of excellence that delights everyone involved.



¹ <https://www.mgma.com/data/data-stories/almost-one-year-into-covid-19-patient-satisfaction> | ² <https://www.jdpower.com/sites/default/files/file/2020-09/2020124%20U.S.%20Telehealth%20Study%20v2.pdf> | ³ Thanks to Mia Finkelston, MD for ideas included in her article: <https://www.mgma.com/resources/quality-patient-experience/how-providers-can-fine-tune-their-website-manner>

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