

HealthLeaders

a Simplify **Compliance** brand



TELEHEALTH: NEW REALITY, NEW STRATEGY

Creating a healthcare experience that
consumers really want

SPONSORED BY



healthgrades.

TELEHEALTH: NEW REALITY, NEW STRATEGY



CAREY OFFICER

Operational Vice President,
Center for Health Delivery
Innovation for Nemours Children's
Health System



DAVID SLOWINSKE

Senior Vice President
of Operations,
Allina Health



LISA WILLIAMS

Director of Digital Engagement,
Oregon Health & Science
University

Healthcare organizations broke technology, regulatory, reimbursement, and clinical barriers to launch a full range of telehealth services in the early days of COVID-19. Industry leaders say the pandemic has changed the course of telehealth in two significant ways: It has sped up telehealth progress by several years, and it has permanently changed how consumers want to interact with the healthcare system.

“Consumers expect virtual care to be readily available to them now,” says David Slowinske, senior vice president of operations for Allina Health, which prior to the pandemic offered a robust hospital-based telehealth program but limited outpatient visits to online nurse appointments for low-acuity conditions. Since the pandemic, outpatient telehealth visits have spiked from 1% to 60% of patient volumes. “We have made the transition where we are leveraging the deep relationships we have with our patients and really adopting more of a ‘virtual first’ mindset,” says Slowinske.

“WE HAVE MADE THE TRANSITION WHERE WE ARE LEVERAGING THE DEEP RELATIONSHIPS WE HAVE WITH OUR PATIENTS AND REALLY ADOPTING MORE OF A ‘VIRTUAL FIRST’ MINDSET.”

—David Slowinske, senior vice president of operations for Allina Health

“As we think about the future, we are going to see consumers move towards those healthcare facilities that have the capabilities to do [telehealth] easily and seamlessly,” says Carey Officer, operational vice president of the Center for Health Delivery Innovation for Jacksonville, Florida-based Nemours Children’s Health System, which began its telehealth journey in 2015. The organization dramatically increased the number of providers offering telehealth services from 190 to 820 with the arrival of COVID-19. Its average daily virtual care volume increased by 2,200%, jumping from 65 to 1,500 visits.

These stories are becoming more common in a post-pandemic world. Hence, the race for growth and new customers is on. As virtual care programs take flight, it will be critical to engage customers with an authentic digital health experience before someone else does.



TELEHEALTH ADOPTION STRATEGIES FOR A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Health systems and hospitals responded quickly to the COVID-19 crisis by increasing their telehealth capabilities almost overnight. As healthcare organizations return to full-time operations, now is the time to build on that patient trust and loyalty by growing and promoting your telehealth program, says Shane Johnston, vice president of integrated marketing strategy at Healthgrades. “A big focus will be on creating strategies that drive telehealth awareness and conversion,” he says. Johnston discusses how telehealth has changed the patient’s healthcare journey and key strategies for marketing and messaging your program.



SHANE JOHNSTON
Vice President,
Integrated Marketing Strategy
Healthgrades

How does telehealth fit into the broader patient journey? How can hospitals and health systems rework elements within the patient journey with the adoption of telehealth?

Shane Johnston: It may sound counterintuitive, but in talking to our hospital clients, we are learning that telehealth

is actually accelerating the patient journey for those who need to come in and receive treatment. Patients are more likely to schedule an appointment sooner if they are given the option of a virtual care visit because it removes certain barriers related to safety and convenience. In turn, this speeds up both

the diagnosis and referral processes. Telehealth will improve care quality and streamline the patient journey even more as organizations make the leap to wearables and remote monitoring, securely monitor a patient’s condition, and feed that data to the physician or specialist for a telehealth call.

What are the most effective strategies for driving telehealth adoption among consumers and physicians?

Johnston: Now that the pandemic has ensured telehealth is no longer a novelty, hospitals need to include telehealth as a standard call to action and develop messaging for specific audiences. Currently, one of the main messages is that telehealth provides safe and convenient access to care. As we move past the pandemic, the safety message will still be important, but providers will also need messages for different demographics. The motivation to use telehealth is going to be different for a person who is completely mobile with a car, where eliminating the hassle of an in-person appointment will be appealing, vs. a senior who has limited mobility or someone who lives in a rural community. The latter two groups will see telehealth as a necessity.

Physicians have been somewhat slow to adopt telehealth because they feel in-office visits are the best route to making a human connection. Of course, nothing beats a face-to-face

“AS WE MOVE PAST THE PANDEMIC, THE SAFETY MESSAGE WILL STILL BE IMPORTANT, BUT PROVIDERS WILL ALSO NEED MESSAGES FOR DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHICS.”

—Shane Johnston, vice president, Integrated Marketing Strategy, Healthgrades

for personal connection. But as broadband access—both landline and wireless—becomes ubiquitous, providers can see patients eye-to-eye and pick up on reactions during their conversations. Physicians also see telehealth as a preferred option for keeping patients safe during and after the pandemic. Another factor driving adoption is the wave of postponed elective surgeries that are going to hit. Physicians can't possibly schedule everyone for an in-person visit. At the same time, providers who want to expand their primary service area will need telehealth to reach more patients.

Once in-person appointments start to open up, how do you determine

what type of appointments are best for telehealth, and how do you perform market analysis?

Johnston: Health checkups for patients with low-acuity and chronic conditions are ideal for telehealth visits. That being said, healthcare organizations should segment and analyze their markets similar to service lines to determine what health conditions and consumer attributes are best suited for a telehealth program. You need to look at patient mix and mobility (including the number of seniors vs. younger people in your market), types of services patients are receiving, and payer mix to create an impactful telehealth program and marketing strategy. ■

SPONSORED BY



Designing a stronger customer experience

Innovation, patient engagement, and the consumer experience are critical themes healthcare leaders must now consider as they expand their telehealth offerings and craft a unique customer journey.

Prior to the pandemic, Slowinske says Allina Health was already making moves to empower consumers to access care on their own terms by designing a direct-to-consumer telehealth framework. “That is one of the reasons why we were able to make the pivot so quickly.” Within a week, the hospital system, which includes 13 hospitals and 90 clinics in Minnesota, was performing 2,000 telehealth visits a day. By late May, that number had grown to 5,000. Virtual care visits now address everything from common ailments to chronic disease via video, medical messaging, or phone, he says.

“In many ways, our long-term strategies eight weeks ago became our short-term strategies overnight,” says Slowinske. “We hit our five-year growth goal that we had set earlier in the year in the first few weeks of the pandemic and now have 100% of our 1,200 providers trained on virtual visits.”

Moving ahead, Allina Health will engage more broadly with patients and consumers through telehealth rollouts such as virtual urgent care, which is becoming a growth tactic and a new-patient acquisition channel, says Slowinske. “Virtual urgent care improves access and reduces geographic restraints that brick and mortar create.” Allina Health also aims to connect virtual care with brick-and-mortar visits more seamlessly and will offer telehealth appointments for services such as physical therapy that traditionally were available only in an office setting.

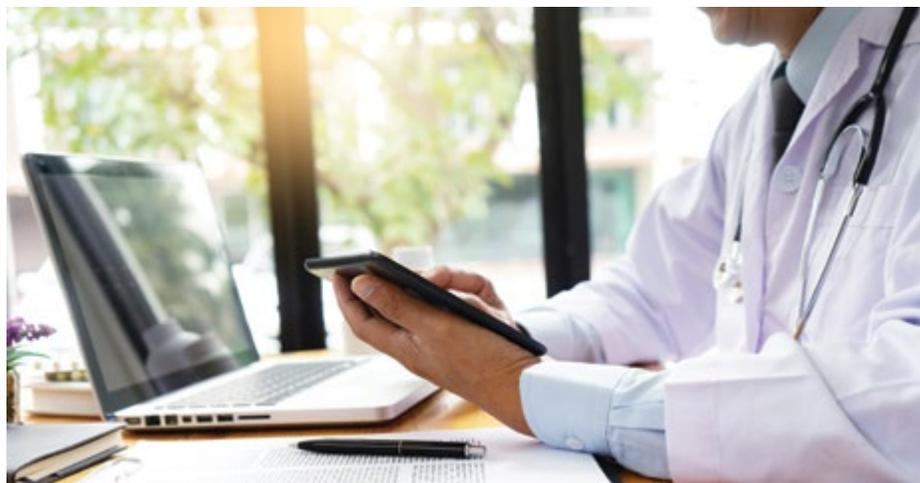
“We are allowing consumers to tell us what they are looking for and then very quickly piloting those solutions and iterating on them to make them better,” he says.

Nemours, which has two freestanding hospitals and 80

clinic locations in five states, is on a similar trajectory to engage patients and attract new customers. Its telehealth program began with connecting patients in community hospitals to Nemours physicians via an iPad® appointment. The program has expanded to offer a 24/7 on-demand urgent care program in seven states, as well as subspecialty care in the home via the Nemours CareConnect app.

“We have developed protocols and we know what works,” says Officer. “Because of this, we were able to rapidly increase services and continue to see our patients and families during COVID-19 and to do that well, which was a huge advantage.”

During the pandemic, Nemours also leveraged virtual rounding in its hospitals and continues



TELEHEALTH: NEW REALITY, NEW STRATEGY

to enhance its program. By the end of summer, it will deploy a single Nemours app, which integrates previous apps and all of the organization's digital health capabilities into one easy-to-use patient experience application. Also, as its hospitals and clinics slowly reopen, some areas will offer Tele-Well visits that blend virtual and physical visits, as well as multispecialty clinics that allow a patient to see multiple specialists in one video visit. "In the future, telehealth at Nemours will be a big piece of every subspecialty, and we will look at other things we can do in the home such as remote patient monitoring," says Officer.

Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), an academic health center in Portland that includes three hospitals and multiple clinics, also is on a path of strong growth and innovation. Its telehealth program began in 2017 as a push to serve more Oregonians, says Lisa Williams, director of digital engagement. The program included virtual visits and urgent care. OHSU monthly telehealth visits skyrocketed from 300 in February to nearly 4,000 in March and 21,000 in May, surpassing its goal of 16,000 visits by 2025.

"The telehealth leadership team came together quickly and trained more staff to serve COVID-19–related virtual visits, basic urgent care, and specialty care visits," says Williams, noting that OHSU now offers telehealth visits across 70 specialties.

Moving past the pandemic, OHSU plans to market its telehealth program to new demographics, including older



"THE TELEHEALTH LEADERSHIP TEAM CAME TOGETHER QUICKLY AND TRAINED MORE STAFF TO SERVE COVID-19–RELATED VIRTUAL VISITS, BASIC URGENT CARE, AND SPECIALTY CARE VISITS."

—Lisa Williams, director of digital engagement at Oregon Health & Science University

and younger customers, in a move to capture a larger segment of the market, she says. "One way to reach an older audience is by removing technology barriers. We know that almost 40% of our patients experience telehealth on mobile and it wasn't a good experience, so they have updated to Zoom® as the video mechanism. Telehealth also helps us make that connection with a younger audience, who haven't been as big a part of the population we serve as an academic health center."

Predicting patient needs

As healthcare leaders seek to build impactful telehealth marketing campaigns, they are focusing marketing efforts on understanding why customers use telehealth and how they prefer to access those services.

TELEHEALTH: NEW REALITY, NEW STRATEGY

The pandemic helped OHSU address both consumer adoption and organizational readiness for telehealth, says Williams. “The next steps for clinical and marketing efforts will be to understand where telehealth access makes the most sense for consumers, where are they comfortable getting care remotely, and what types of services need to be in person,” she adds.

OHSU uses a CRM tool to predict telehealth needs and how customers interact with other parts of the organization before and after a telehealth visit. “We hope to use CRM data to better understand how we engage people with population health and how we engage with them to capture more market share,” says Williams. “CRM data has helped us illustrate that we need to see their care with us in a more holistic, systemic way.”

Williams says marketing telehealth has been a challenge, given that more dollars have been going to patient care during the pandemic and less to campaign budgets. “One thing we are doing is capping the cost for conversion and making the most of our paid media,” she says, noting that while most customers find OHSU service lines through organic search, this is not the case for virtual visits. “We depend heavily on paid media to compete in this area,” she says.

“One strategy for maximizing marketing dollars is complementing CRM data with a smart, organic inbound plan and going for the low-hanging fruit such as keyword volume around a particular condition and providing continued education,” Williams notes. She says OHSU uses the Net Promoter Score (NPS) survey to measure the telehealth experience, which has been impactful, noting that NPS scores hover between the high 70s and low 80s.

“WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND WHERE OUR PATIENTS ARE, HOW WE COMMUNICATE TO THEM BEST, AND WHERE WE GET THE BEST RETURN FOR OUR INVESTMENT WHEN IT COMES TO THOSE MARKETING DOLLARS.”

—Carey Officer, operational vice president of the Center for Health Delivery Innovation for Nemours Children’s Health System

Nemours markets its 24/7 on-demand telehealth program and plans to promote telehealth specialty care programs as they become more comprehensive. Officer says one marketing goal is to understand the full patient journey and use technologies and channels such as social media to track how patients are learning about and using the Nemours app.

“We are seeing what channels work well and optimizing them to reduce the cost of marketing spend per visit,” says Officer. “We want to understand where our patients are, how we communicate to them best, and where we get the best return for our investment when it comes to those marketing dollars.” She adds, “Social media has been a place we have seen a good return.”

Nemours measures the telehealth patient experience through the Nemours CareConnect app. Patients on average rate their provider experience 4.9 out of 5 stars and rate the overall service 4.8 stars. “That makes a pretty strong case that this is something patients and families want to continue to leverage in the future,” says Officer. ■



Healthgrades enables health systems to drive growth through smarter patient acquisition and retention in a highly competitive, consumer-driven marketplace.

Discover how we help providers connect with the millions of Americans looking for telehealth services at [hg.tips/promote-my-telehealth](https://www.healthgrades.com/tips/promote-my-telehealth).