

The future of virtual care: Telehealth 5-year outlook.

With a higher rate of telehealth usage post-pandemic, many healthcare organizations are evaluating the future of telehealth and working to craft a more deliberate, strategic approach to virtual care. Here's a look at current telehealth trends and where telehealth is expected to be in the next five years.

The case for telehealth

Several factors are driving an interest in telehealth for hospitals and health systems:

- **The continuing workforce shortage**, which has organizations looking for ways to cover the gaps
- **Escalating labor costs**, driven by the workforce shortage and unprecedented healthcare demands during the pandemic
- The need to provide care to **rural or otherwise underserved populations**
- An effort to **relieve some of the pressure on staff** and reduce burnout

Tech challenges and opportunities

Many health systems allowed departments to independently purchase telehealth technology during the pandemic, leading to a patchwork of telehealth systems. Now hospitals want to reverse that fragmentation with standardized telehealth technology. As hospitals look for the ideal solutions, they are considering:

- Data security
- Integration with existing platforms like the EHR, as well as scheduling, and billing
- Flexibility and control over workflows
- The capacity to scale along with expanding telehealth offerings
- Consumer experience

Telehealth staffing models

Hospitals and health systems are mapping every touch point in the patient care journey to figure out where it makes most sense to use telehealth versus in-person care. Once those use cases have been identified, the next step is to decide how to staff telehealth services. Essentially, systems have three options:

Staff with internal resources. With this model, an organization maintains control over training, protocols, and the clinical workflow. The downside is that sufficient internal resources may not exist, particularly in already understaffed departments.

Telehealth platform provider pool. Some telehealth platforms offer a pool of providers to staff the service. One concern with this approach is that the telehealth experience can feel entirely disconnected from traditional care and from the standard clinical workflows. Additionally, the hospital has less control over physician quality or training, and shared services can create very long wait times.

Locum tenens staffing. Using locum tenens providers to jumpstart a telehealth program allows organizations to quickly expand into new markets or services – fully staffed – and then expand their permanent staff more slowly and sustainably as those services get off the ground. The downside of this approach is that it can be more costly, but it does enable the health system to maintain the revenue cycle, dictate the clinical workflows, and control the technology and tools.



The five-year telehealth outlook

Within five years, consumers will have many more options for choosing either virtual or in-person for every visit that's possible to provide virtually. Expected changes include:

- Enterprise acceptance and adoption
- More full-time telehealth specialist positions, staffed by physicians who have perfected their "webside manner" and are comfortable seeing patients virtually
- Health systems sharing or stacking telehealth services with each other in order to address specialist shortages and fill gaps
- The adoption of AI to augment the delivery of telehealth services such as chatbots that serve as the first touchpoint for consumers as they interact with a health system

The virtual patient experience

The most critical challenge in deploying telehealth is to create the right patient experience – from the first touchpoint through care delivery and follow up – so patients will want to engage with telehealth. Solving that challenge is fundamental for the future success of telehealth.

CHG Healthcare can help you staff your telehealth program with locum tenens providers. Give us a call at [866.588.5996](tel:866.588.5996) or email ecs.contact@chghealthcare.com to learn more.