

Incorporating Telehealth in Home Health Care

Practical Strategies and Applications

Introduction

Telehealth adoption among home health agencies (HHAs) in Maryland has doubled since the start of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE). About 25 percent of HHAs reported using telehealth in January 2020 compared to an estimated 53 percent in May.¹ This exceeds the nation by approximately 13 percent.² HHAs use various telehealth technologies (e.g., video visits, remote patient monitoring or “RPM”, mHealth applications) to supplement in-person visits and other services.³

During the PHE, telehealth has helped HHAs continue providing necessary services while limiting person-to-person contact to reduce exposure to COVID-19,⁴ preserve limited supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE),⁵ address personnel shortages, and manage the surge of patients at home recovering from COVID-19.⁶

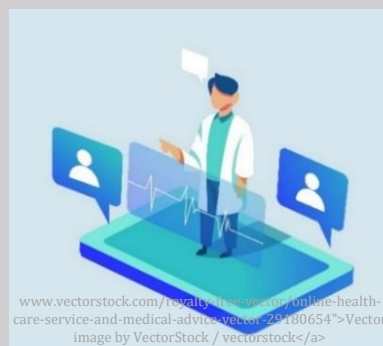
Telehealth Uses in Home Care

Telehealth supports a variety of clinical uses in home health care, including transitional care, palliative care, chronic disease management, mental and behavioral health, and others.⁹ Use of virtual care can optimize delivery of home health services, including:

- Conducting frequent check-ins to support care continuity, particularly for high-risk patients (e.g., frequent hospital utilizers, recently diagnosed, or those with multiple chronic conditions)¹⁰

What is RPM?

RPM⁷ uses technologies to collect health data outside of a clinical setting (e.g., patient’s home) and transmit that data to the care team in another location. RPM facilitates home monitoring without the need to send staff for a house visit.⁸ It is a favored technology among HHAs; about 89 percent of HHAs that use telehealth in the State have an RPM program.



¹ A total of 38 HHAs in January and 22 HHAs in May 2020 responded to an environmental scan conducted by MHCC; adoption rates may not be representative of all HHAs (N = 54) in the State.

² mHealth Intelligence, *The Promise and Potential for Telehealth in Home Health*, July 2020. Available at: mhealthintelligence.com/features/the-promise-and-potential-for-telehealth-in-home-health.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Home Health Care News, *Wound Care Pilot Improves Outcomes, Reduces Cost for AccentCare*, June 2019. Available at: homehealthcarenews.com/2019/06/wound-care-pilot-improves-outcomes-reduces-cost-for-accentcare/.

⁵ Electronic Health Reporter, *How Home Health Care Agencies Are Using Telehealth*, March 2020. Available at: electronichealthreporter.com/how-home-health-care-agencies-are-using-telehealth/.

⁶ Healthcare IT News, *A guide to telehealth vendors in the age of COVID-19*, March 2020. Available at: www.healthcareitnews.com/news/guide-telehealth-vendors-age-covid-19.

⁷ RPM is often used for chronic disease management, care coordination, and sharing educational materials. More information is available at: news.careinnovations.com/blog/how-home-health-and-rpm-benefit-one-another.

⁸ Using RPM for home monitoring allows providers to have a comprehensive view of their patients’ health trends and lifestyles, improving quality of care. More information is available at: news.careinnovations.com/blog/benefits-of-remote-patient-monitoring-rpm-for-patients.

⁹ See n. 2, *Supra*.

¹⁰ See n. 6, *Supra*.

- Providing continuing patient education, reminders, and coaching on self-management skills (e.g., monitoring blood pressure, administering insulin injections)¹¹
- Enhancing family and caregiver involvement and education through family care conferences¹²
- Immediate medical response following emergencies (e.g., falls, wound care)¹³ to minimize unnecessary hospitalizations¹⁴
- Virtual monitoring of patients' home environment and available resources to promote individualized care¹⁵



Benefits of Telehealth Services

Offering telehealth benefits HHA staff and patients with the aim of improving efficiencies in care delivery, advancing health outcomes, and avoiding adverse events. Telehealth helps to:

- Increase ability for patients to live independently at home¹⁶

*Telehealth offers peace of mind and safety while allowing older populations to retain their independence.*¹⁷

- Enhance flexibility in service delivery and reduce the burden of travel for HHA staff¹⁸

Telehealth provides flexibility in scheduling and helps save time on visits by eliminating equipment set-up at patients' homes.

- Expand workforce capacity and access to skilled and specialty care¹⁹

Virtual care makes it easier to reach patients in rural areas and manage patient influx.

- Provide critical updates and self-care tips during national disasters and infectious disease outbreaks, like the COVID-19 PHE²⁰

Video visits are a safe choice to deliver many services, connect with patients, and alleviate loneliness. They also reduce the need for PPE during a patient visit.

¹¹ See n. 2, *Supra*.

¹² HomeCare, *6 Steps to Rolling Out a Telehealth Program During COVID-19*, July 2020. Available at: www.homecaremag.com/home-health/6-steps-rolling-out-telehealth-program-during-covid-19.

¹³ The SeniorList, *How Telemedicine is Affecting Home Health Care*, April 2020. Available at: www.theseniorlist.com/blog/how-telemedicine-is-affecting-home-health-care/.

¹⁴ Medbridge, *Incorporating Telehealth into Home Health Care Part 1: Practical Strategies*, April 2020. Available at: www.medbridgeeducation.com/blog/2020/04/incorporating-telehealth-into-home-health-care-part-1-practical-strategies/.

¹⁵ See n.5, *Supra*.

¹⁶ AARP Public Policy Institute, *Using Telehealth to Improve Home-Based Care for Older Adults and Family Caregivers*, May 2018. Available at: www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2018/05/using-telehealth-to-improve-home-based-care-for-older-adults-and-family-caregivers.pdf.

¹⁷ Provider perspectives are based on phone interviews with Medstar Health Home Care.

¹⁸ See n. 5, *Supra*.

¹⁹ See n. 14, *Supra*.

²⁰ Relias, *5 Best Practices in Telehealth for Behavioral Health*, April 2020. Available at: www.relias.com/blog/5-best-practices-in-telehealth.

Tips for Adopting Telehealth

The following are some practical considerations when implementing telehealth:

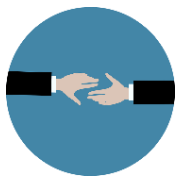


- Keep an open mind, this is a culture shift for many providers

- Assess technology and equipment needs²¹



- Provide onboarding and regular training for staff and patients on operating technology²²



- Begin slowly and rollout with a few providers

- Use technology to support various services (e.g., patient assessment, health education, physical therapy)²³

Lessons Learned from HHAs

Anticipate an adjustment period as providers rethink care delivery and assess what services can be provided remotely. Many providers who were reluctant at first have seen the value of telehealth since the start of the PHE.

Offer telehealth to patients who have access to technology (e.g., smartphones, tablets, and computers with internet access) at home first to minimize initial investment costs.

There is a learning curve to feeling at ease with virtual care; some may experience frustration or difficulties with the technology.

Start small to allow time to adapt workflows, assess patient and provider needs, and address potential challenges.

Virtual physical therapy sessions can help improve patient endurance and strength while being monitored for proper form.

Additional Resources

MHCC Telehealth Virtual Resource Center

mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/Pages/hit/hit_telemedicine/hit_telemedicine_virtual_resource.aspx

National Association for Home Care & Hospice
Coronavirus Resources

www.nahc.org/resources-services/coronavirus-resources/

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,
Flexibilities to Fight COVID-19

www.cms.gov/files/document/covid-home-health-agencies.pdf

Questions?



Contact us at: mhcc.telehealth@maryland.gov

²¹ See n. 14, *Supra*.

²² National Care Planning Council, *About Home Telehealth*. Available at: www.longtermcarelink.net/eldercare/home_telehealth.htm.

²³ As of December 2020, visits provided through telecommunication methods do not count as in-person visits toward the plan of care; however, they may reduce the frequency of needed in-person visits. More information is available at: www.cms.gov/files/document/covid-home-health-agencies.pdf.