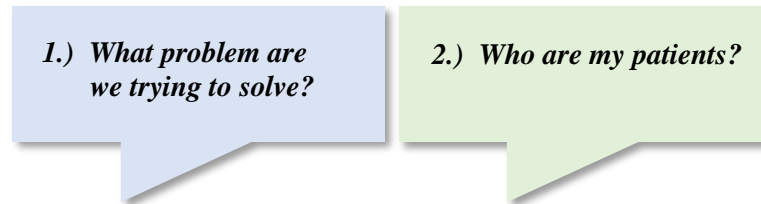


Identifying a Telehealth Solution that Works for Your Practice

Overview

Choosing the right telehealth solution for your practice is important. Practices have options when it comes to telehealth and should give careful consideration to how technologies align with practice and patient needs and integrate into operational and clinical workflows.¹ As a first step, practices should answer two questions:



Answering these questions will inform your practice's purchase decision. This includes helping identify services that can be moved online, such as non-acute primary care, follow-up visits, and chronic care management.² Next steps consist of looking at available telehealth solutions and selecting one that best meets your practice's goals and priorities.^{3,4}

Choosing a Telehealth Solution

It's important to understand the basic technical requirements for telehealth: software (e.g., cloud-based videoconferencing and mobile applications), hardware (e.g., a laptop, tablet, or smartphone, and high-definition cameras and peripheral devices⁵), and a strong internet connection. The following questions are intended to guide selection of a telehealth solution that works for your practice. Questions are illustrative and not exhaustive of all considerations for evaluating a telehealth solution.

Assess practice needs (clinical and operational) and set clear, realistic goals.^{6,7}

Determining your practice needs will help set parameters and priorities for evaluating telehealth vendors. Consider expectations for telehealth practice, goals, and elements required for success.

- How can telehealth support care delivery in your practice? For example, should telehealth be used to improve chronic care management, facilitate care transitions, maintain patient engagement, provide more options for behavioral health services, screen patients for symptoms, etc.?

¹ The University of Arizona, Telemedicine Workflow: Six Questions You Have to Answer to Succeed, February 2019. Available at: telemedicine.arizona.edu/blog/telemedicine-workflow-six-questions-you-have-answer-succeed.

² mHealth Intelligence, Picking the Right Telehealth Platform For a Small or Solo Practice, April 2018. Available at: mhealthintelligence.com/features/picking-the-right-telehealth-platform-for-a-small-or-solo-practice.

³ American Academy of Pediatrics, Getting Started in Telehealth. Available at: www.aap.org/en-us/professional-resources/practice-transformation/telehealth/Pages/Getting-Started-in-Telehealth.aspx.

⁴ National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health, Telehealth Technologies and Preparing to Select a Vendor, September 2016. Available at: nosorh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NOSORH-Telehealth-Vendor-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf.

⁵ Peripherals devices are diagnostic tools that collect and transmit high definition audio, video, images, and health data from a patient to a provider, such as digital stethoscopes, otoscopes, digital ultrasound, etc.

⁶ Medical Economics, How to select the right telemedicine vendor, April 2018. Available at: www.medicaleconomics.com/technology/how-select-right-telemedicine-vendor.

⁷ See n. 3, *Supra*.

- What workflows must be redesigned to support care delivery using telehealth? For example, how will the practice rearrange its physical workspace, modify procedures for scheduling appointments, use staff time, communicate new processes, etc.?
- What are patient preferences for receiving care? For example, how often do they communicate after hours (outside normal business hours) via email or phone, and are they comfortable using technology like a patient portal?
- What features are a must have, and what might be optional? For example, are e-prescribing, billing, or language services included? Would a mobile application be of value? Can the telehealth technology be integrated with the practice management and electronic health record (EHR) systems?
- What is your timeline for telehealth implementation? For example, are you looking to provide telehealth services immediately? Are your telehealth goals designed to be short and/or long-term?
- How much has your practice budgeted to implement telehealth? The budget should consider things like upfront purchase costs, ongoing maintenance costs, staff time, and reimbursement.

Evaluate solutions across five key areas to find your best partner.^{8,9}

Comparing vendor information as it relates to features, quality, safety, EHR integrations, among others will help align practice needs, goals, and priorities with a telehealth solution. Information can be found on vendor websites and by contacting customer service representatives.



Business

- What value added services can the vendor provide (e.g., staff and patient training, IT support, etc.)?
- How much does the solution cost? What costs are included and which are optional (e.g., ongoing subscription fees, implementation and maintenance, software upgrades)?
- How long would it take to set up and launch the solution? What is the process?

Information Technology

- Will the product integrate with your EHR and other systems?
- What features are standard? Can the solution be customized to meet practice-specific needs?
- What are the minimum broadband speed requirements? (You can test your internet bandwidth at [verizon.com/speedtest/](https://www.verizon.com/speedtest/).) How are connectivity issues managed?
- Is a mobile application required and if so, is one available for patients to download from Apple iOS and Android devices (common mobile operating systems)?

⁸ American Medical Association (AMA), Telehealth Implementation Playbook, April, 2020. Available at: www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2020-04/ama-telehealth-playbook.pdf.

⁹ AMA, Steps Forward, Telemedicine. Available at: edhub.ama-assn.org/steps-forward/module/2702689.

Security

- Can you confirm that patient data will not be used in anyway counter to HIPAA requirements (e.g., for treatment of a patient or health care operations¹⁰)?
- What types of security protections are offered (e.g., encryption, signed business associate agreements (BAA), HIPAA compliance, other third-party security accreditations and certifications¹¹)?
- How are users authenticated and authorized (i.e., how are provider and patient identities managed)?

Usability

- Is the technology intuitive and easy to use?
- Does the solution offer some way for patients and caregivers to provide feedback on their telehealth experience?

Customer Service

- What technical support is offered for staff (e.g., pre-launch support, ongoing)?
- What is the process and associated cost for technical support?

*Please note, the Maryland Health Care Commission does not certify or endorse any telehealth technology, software, applications, or products.

Additional Resources

- MHCC Telehealth Virtual Resource Center
mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/Pages/hit/hit_telemedicine/hit_telemedicine_virtual_resource.aspx
- MHCC Telehealth Readiness Assessment Tool
<https://tinyurl.com/mhcctelehealthtool>
- CMS, General Provider Telehealth and Telemedicine Toolkit
www.cms.gov/files/document/general-telemedicine-toolkit.pdf

Questions?

Contact us at

mhcc.telehealth@maryland.gov

¹⁰ More information about HIPAA permitted use of health care data is available at: www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/guidance/permitted-uses/index.html.

¹¹ Third-party security accreditations and certifications help organizations maintain high standards of cyber risk management and patient data loss prevention by identifying and remediating privacy, security, confidentiality and risk exposures. More information is available at: www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/protecting-personal-health-information-the-role-of-third-party-accreditation-to-ensure-compliance.html.