

New Survey Shows Clinicians Seek an “Enterprise” Approach to Telehealth



It's not a stretch to say that telehealth is on its way to changing

the face of medicine. The dynamic nature of telehealth is pushing healthcare practitioners who use it to change the way they approach other aspects of their work as well. REACH Health, a telemedicine software company, has recently released a report that encapsulates the current state of some of those shifting healthcare approaches.

When telehealth was newer and less widely embraced, typically it would be confined to certain departments within a healthcare operation. But what the REACH survey reveals is that many hospitals are stepping out of that more circumscribed approach to telemedicine and rather, applying telehealth services across departments in a centralized manner that allows the facilities to incorporate analytic data and electronic health records (EHRs) into decisions about patient care.

Centralized telemedicine edges out the compartmentalized approach

According to the survey, nearly 40% of healthcare entities are using telemedicine with an “enterprise approach”; in other words, managing telehealth resources across different care settings or service departments. Around a quarter of those healthcare organizations surveyed report that they are currently in the process of shifting from a “siloe” telehealth system to an enterprise system. The remaining third or so of survey participants state that they have discrete telemedicine programs used exclusively by the departments to which they belong.

The report opined that an enterprise approach to telehealth could serve to increase a healthcare organization's return on investment (ROI) and boost its efficiency, and at the same time would bring telehealth more meaningfully and consistently into the patient care workflow.

Steve McGraw is President and [CEO of REACH Health](#). “We saw a high degree of value placed on platform features related to data and analytics, EHR integration and support for off-the-shelf endpoints such as laptops and tablets,” he said. “These features and capabilities tend to have a greater impact on the organization as a whole more than individual departments because they are integral to maximizing the value of investments in equipment and software.”

What healthcare organizations want most out of telehealth

Healthcare businesses were asked about what they looked for most in telehealth platforms. In order of most requested (by 94% of those surveyed), to least requested (by 79% of participants), the six features are: integrated



audio and video to allow practitioners to work with patients live; a platform that could create clinical documentation for each patient consultation; mobile device support; the ability to send clinical notes or data to and from EHRs; HIPAA-compliant telemedical communication among clinicians; and platforms that improve performance by analyzing data gathered in consultations.

Overall, healthcare organizations reported a “patient first, ROI second” goals mindset for telehealth, a focus on better patient outcomes (nearly 90% of the survey respondents) and patient satisfaction (86%), with a secondary focus of increasing business revenue (a little over half of those surveyed). Also, more than 80% of the organizations ranked improving patient convenience as a high priority, as well as using telehealth to provide care to rural or remote individuals. And, as was the case with the lower-priority ROI goal, the report showed that only 53% of healthcare entities saw capturing market share from competitors as an important perk of telehealth.

Reimbursement frustrations cited by nearly 40% of respondents

In terms of obstacles in the way of implementing and using the telehealth platform more routinely and reliably, survey respondents pointed to reimbursement issues as the main hurdle, in both government and private reimbursement.

Medicare reimbursement challenges ranked at the top, with 39% of the organizations citing that government entity as providing the most common impediment to telemedicine success (and 36% stated Medicaid was the most bothersome agency in terms of getting paid for telemedicine services). The lack of acceptable telehealth parity laws was cited as the biggest stumbling block by 38% of respondents. And 34% of healthcare businesses pointed the finger at private payers as the cause of telehealth reimbursement woes.

The survey’s authors summed up the data this way: “Analysis of this information exposed numerous findings such as the challenges that have been most widely mitigated and those that continue to pose obstacles, as well as identifying telemedicine program attributes that are highly correlated to success.”

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