

## Dec. 13, 2018: Advocacy spotlight on First national estimate of telemedicine use by physicians

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### First national estimate of telemedicine use by physicians

The AMA's Carol Kane, PhD, and Kurt Gillis, PhD, have authored a study documenting the first nationally representative estimates on how physicians use telemedicine, published in *Health Affairs*. They found that telemedicine is more frequently utilized in larger practices and among certain specialties like emergency medicine and radiology. The use of telemedicine for interactions with other health care professionals is also higher among physicians in nonmetropolitan areas.

By examining a 2016 survey of 3,500 physicians, Kane and Gillis gauged the emergence of telemedicine and its integration into health care delivery, while noting that further legislative and regulatory changes could encourage use in the future.

"There are no nationally representative estimates on its use by physicians across all medical specialties," said Carol K. Kane, study co-author and AMA director of economic and health policy research. "To fill this information gap, the AMA study surveyed 3,500 physicians to provide needed data that will help assess potential barriers and create strategies to promote telemedicine adoption."

The study found that 15.4 percent of physicians worked in practices that used telemedicine for patient interactions, such as diagnosing or treating patients, and following up with or managing patients with chronic conditions. 11.2 percent of physicians worked in practices that used telemedicine for interactions with health care professionals, such as having a specialty consultation or getting a second opinion. Videoconferencing was the most common modality, being utilized in the practice of 12.6 percent of physicians surveyed.

Among specialties, the use of telemedicine for patient interactions ranged from 6.1 percent for the internal medicine subspecialty of allergy/immunology to 39.5 percent for radiology. The use of telemedicine for interactions with other health care professionals ranged from 3.3 percent for allergy/immunology to 38.8 percent for radiology.

More generally, physicians in larger practices and in ones that were not physician owned were more likely to use telemedicine for interactions with both patients and health care professionals. The higher use in nonmetropolitan locations for interactions with health care professionals suggests that physicians are using telemedicine to alleviate access issues when relevant subspecialists are not

available. However, the financial burden of implementation still appears to present a problem for smaller and physician-owned practices.

The AMA is committed to making technology an asset, not a burden, and continues to invest in resources that provide physicians with a proven path for integrating telemedicine and digital health technologies into patient care.

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