AMA helps business leaders grasp digital health’s true value

JUL 13, 2021

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What’s the news: The AMA has detailed for the sophisticated executive readership of Harvard Business Review a holistic framework for how physicians, health care organizations, payers and policymakers can better assess the value of virtual care as the U.S. inches toward a post-pandemic telehealth landscape.

In their essay, “How to Measure the Value of Virtual Health Care,” some of the AMA’s top digital health experts spelled out the “Return on Health” framework that they have developed in collaboration with colleagues at the Manatt Health consulting firm.

The framework includes six value streams:

- Clinical outcomes, quality and safety.
- Access to care.
- Patient and family experience.
- Clinician experience.
- Financial and operational impact.
- Health equity.

“As the pandemic ebbs, policymakers and payers are deciding whether and how much to pay for virtual care services in the future, leaving clinicians uncertain about whether they will be able to afford to continue their virtual care programs,” notes the Harvard Business Review essay. “But parties are often making these decisions based on outdated or limited measures of success that do not holistically reflect the realities of how value is being generated.”

Read more about the AMA’s call for action to help telehealth flourish post-pandemic.

Why it’s important: Before COVID-19 hit, virtual care amounted to less than 1% of U.S. care, then skyrocketed during the pandemic.
“While there has been much progress, the existing body of evidence for telehealth is narrowly focused on short-term measures of the financial value of virtual health. There is much opportunity to now gather details on broader benefits such as improvements in access to care, clinical outcomes, the impact on the patient and clinician experience, the potential for operational efficiencies, and the impact on health equity,” says the Harvard Business Review essay.

The article was co-written by AMA digital health executives Meg Barron, Vimal Mishra, MD, and Stacy Lloyd, MPH, along with Jared Augenstein of Manatt Health. Dr. Mishra also is associate professor of medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University and a medical director at VCU Health, which saw no-show rates in its telepsychiatry program fall from 11% before COVID-19 to 6% during the pandemic. That’s one example of a value stream from telehealth that is often overlooked.

“VCU Health is now considering how it can use virtual care to reduce the number of wasted time slots to improve its operational performance and improve access,” says the essay. More great case studies drawn from real-world experience at VCU Health, AMA Health System Program member Ochsner Health, and others is available in the AMA-Manatt Health report, “Return on Health: Moving Beyond Dollars and Cents in Realizing the Value of Virtual Care.”

Learn more: Hear directly from Dr. Mishra about the Return on Health framework and how it can be used in this AMA webinar on measuring the value of virtual care.

The webinar is part of the AMA Telehealth Immersion Program, which guides physicians, practices and health systems in optimizing and sustaining telehealth at their organizations.

Through a series of curated webinars, interactive peer-to-peer learning sessions, virtual discussions, bootcamps and resources on-demand, the Telehealth Immersion Program offers a comprehensive curriculum and enhanced experience navigating the world of telehealth alongside peers nationwide.

Find out how others across the country are measuring the value of virtual care and share your own experience in the AMA Physician Innovation Network’s panel discussion on measuring the value of virtual care.