As the nation figures out what telehealth will look like going forward, the AMA is facilitating an ongoing online discussion where experts from across the industry weigh in with their thoughts on how to best measure the value of virtual care.

The online discussion, “Measuring the Value of Virtual Care,” explores topics such as why it’s important to think of virtual care beyond dollars and cents and what still needs to be done to make virtual care equitable. The discussion, hosted at the AMA Physician Innovation Network digital community, allows physicians and industry leaders to share ideas at a time when health care is reinventing how care is delivered.

Here are some of the experts who have shared their insights:

- Bill Eggbeer: Senior advisor and former partner at BDC Advisors LLC, a health care strategy consulting firm.
- Kate Kirley, MD, AMA director of chronic disease prevention.
- Sandy Marks: AMA assistant director of federal affairs.
- Richard Milani, MD, chief clinical transformation officer at Ochsner Health System, an AMA Health System Program member.
- Marcus Osborne, senior vice president of Walmart Health.

Why think about the value of virtual care beyond finances?

**Nelson:** While a financial determination is a component of determining value, other factors such as access, outcomes, satisfaction—patient, community and clinician—and quality of care are also
important factors to consider. And while this is certainly not an exhaustive list of factors, it is important to understand that the measure of value is more than just dollars and cents.

Dr. Milani: From a clinical perspective, we can measure value in terms of clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. In chronic disease care for instance, we have shown statistically significant improvements in disease control, hospitalizations, cost of care and patient satisfaction when compared to standard of care. So, value can incorporate all of these facets.

What must be overcome in move to digitally enabled care?

Eggbeer: Payment models that fairly compensate providers for virtual care. Medicare, Medicaid and most payers have been reimbursing providers for virtual care during the pandemic. These payment practices must be made permanent. Geographic restrictions in provider licensing that were eased during the pandemic must be addressed to enable delivery of virtual care across state lines. Much work is needed to integrate virtual and in-person care in physician practice, outpatient and inpatient clinical care models.

Dr. Kirley: Interoperability remains a big challenge. Digitally enabled care helps us physicians connect with patients outside of the four walls of our clinic. Various digital solutions and devices are collecting potentially useful data that our patients may want to share with us, yet it remains a struggle to get that data back to physicians in a way that’s easy to access and actionable.

How can virtual care address health inequities?

Jelinek: The invisible costs of health care are hard to quantify, but typically impact patients with more challenging economic and social situations. These invisible costs—transportation, lost hourly wages, childcare, etc.—tend to cause patients to deprioritize health care.

Osbourne: Greater equity can be achieved by not dictating the channel in which care is delivered.

Marks: Expanding access to high-speed Wi-Fi should be a priority, as well as making sure people have the devices they need to utilize telehealth.

The benefits of expanded telemedicine are clear. Join physicians who are advocating to permanently expand virtual care coverage by sharing your story of how telehealth and virtual care are adding value in your environment. Defining and measuring specific virtual care value streams is critical as Congress considers future coverage and payment policies.

Catch up with another important discussion, on implementing telehealth with an equity lens, that took
place in October in the AMA Physician Innovation Network digital community. The discussion was a follow-up to an earlier AMA Telehealth Immersion Program webinar on the topic, which can be viewed here.

Copyright 1995 - 2021 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.