3 key insights to understand telehealth's value, and its future

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As health care leaders figure out the best way to incorporate telehealth into patient care, AMA experts shared three insights they've gleaned from what physicians and their practices have learned in the past couple of years.

The AMA's vice president of health solutions, Lori Prestesater, and the vice president of digital health innovations, Meg Barron, spoke with health care executives from around the country at Becker's 6th Annual Health IT + Revenue Cycle Virtual Conference. The AMA sponsored a roundtable discussion on the value of telehealth where Prestesater and Barron offered these three insights.

Physicians want virtual care to continue as long as key concerns are addressed. Doctors are enthusiastic when a solution helps them better care for patients or reduces administrative burdens. There are four key concerns physicians consistently express when evaluating digital solutions: Does it work and have an evidence base? Will they receive fair payment? What liability and privacy concerns are there? How will the change be implemented and managed?

Improved access is one of telehealth's major advantages. Technology gave patients greater access to care during COVID-19. It also increased their access to specialists and behavioral health professionals.

Challenges remain. Technology challenges, including adequate bandwidth in some areas of the country and a way to measure the value of telehealth are among the challenges that remain.

The AMA, in collaboration with Manatt Health, is helping practices find a way to tackle the challenge of measuring virtual care's value. Together they developed the "Return on Health" framework to help organizations realize the value of virtual care beyond the dollars and cents.

The Return on Health Framework is built on existing research and can help articulate digitally enabled care's value by accounting for how a telehealth programs can increase overall health and generate positive impact for patients, clinicians, payers and society.

The framework, which includes a health equity lens for each area, helps you measure:

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

The report also outlines key challenges and opportunities for industry stakeholders to address to accelerate their evolution to digitally-enabled care.

Real world case studies

The Return on Health report includes four case studies that explore virtual care's value through the framework outlined in the report. These real-world examples below were designed and developed in collaboration with organizations that are measuring the value of their virtual care programs.

Telepsychiatry during COVID-19 at Virginia Commonwealth University Health. Discover how patients and clinicians had high satisfaction rates with virtual visits; how no-show rates declined to 6% during the pandemic, down from 11% pre-pandemic and how a patient's age did not impact their access to care.

The hypertension digital medicine program at Ochsner Health. Learn how this New Orleans-based system helped those enrolled in a virtual program achieve greater control of their blood pressure and improve medication adherence compared to patients receiving usual care. See how the program saved $77 per member per month compared to those receiving the usual care.

Teleneurology and telestroke at Massachusetts General Hospital. Patients and physicians give high satisfaction rates to the program. Discover how between 71% and 88% of these emergency patients were able to be treated locally with consultation support. With lower costs in community hospital settings, this generated a cost savings for patients and families.