4 must-haves for doctors to stick with telehealth

NOV 7, 2022

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With physician burnout at all-time high, physicians are searching for ways to provide high-quality patient care while easing some of the burdens prevalent in medicine today.

“Never before has there been a greater need to be able to leverage digital solutions and technologies to help really meet the need of helping to ensure that the patient-physician relationship is as strong as it can possibly be,” Meg Barron, the AMA’s vice present of digital health strategy, said during a recent AMA Telehealth Immersion Program webinar.

Barron and Kevin Gajjar, an AMA market research analyst, presented results from the latest AMA digital health research (PDF) during the webinar. The AMA surveyed 1,300 physicians nationwide this year and compared their answers with answers physicians gave to the questions in 2016 and 2019 to determine how digital health adoption has changed over time and how physicians’ attitudes about using technology have shifted.

The latest research—the first time the questions were asked since the global pandemic’s onset—found that more physicians are using telehealth and other digital health tools regardless of age, gender or specialty and that physicians plan to adopt emerging technology even though usage is low right now. For example, 80% of physicians used televisits in 2022, up from just 14% in 2016 and nearly triple from what was reported in 2019.

Supporting telehealth is an essential component of the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians.

Telehealth is critical to the future of health care, which is why the AMA continues to lead the charge to aggressively expand telehealth policy, research and resources to ensure physician practice sustainability and fair payment.
Uncertainty impedes adoption

About nine in 10 physicians—93%—now believe digital health tools are an advantage for patient care, according to the 2022 survey. That’s up from 85% who felt that way in 2016.

But the 1,300 physicians surveyed indicated that they had four key requirements before jumping in and adopting technology. Physicians want to know:

- Does the technology work?
- Will I receive proper payment?
- Will I be liable—is there liability insurance coverage and are there assurances for data privacy and security?
- Will it work in my practice with my existing workflows?

The survey showed that 85% of physicians said being covered by medical liability insurance and the digital health tool’s being well integrated with the EHR were important to them. In addition, 84% said that their hospital or practice assuring them of data privacy was important, and 83% said felt that way about being paid for the time they spent using the technology.

These four areas that physicians identified as requirements for adopting digital health tools are foundational to the AMA’s overall strategy, Barron said.

“The AMA’s digital health strategy is focused on helping to ensure technology can be an asset and not be one more thing or an additional burden for patients and physicians,” she said.

Telehealth is fundamental to care—now the Senate must act like it.

What motivates adoption?

The survey also asked physicians what attracts them to using a digital health tool in their practice. Gajjar said the top responses were that the technology needs to improve:

- Clinical outcomes.
- Work efficiency.
- Diagnostic ability.
- Care coordination.
- Patient privacy, adherence, convenience and safety.
What’s required for adoption?

While medical liability insurance coverage, EHR integration, data privacy and proper payment remain physicians’ top requirements for adopting new technology, there are other attributes that physicians consider important.

Following are the percentage of physician respondents who said each of these digital health attributes mattered to them. The digital health tool should be:

- Proven as good or superior to traditional care, 80%.
- Intuitive and require no special training, 78%.
- Published in peer-reviewed journals as being safe and effective, 73%.
- The standard of care, 69%.

The AMA has a number of digital health initiatives and resources, including the:

- AMA Digital Health Playbook Series.
- AMA Physician Innovation Network.
- AMA Return on Health Virtual Care Value Framework.
- AMA Telehealth Immersion Program.
- In Full Health Learning & Action Community to Advance Equitable Health Innovation.