As other health systems across the nation are doing, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA)—the country’s largest integrated health system—is finding its way in adapting to include telehealth and other digital health solutions so that it can deliver care in the most efficient and effective way for patients.

And as the health system makes its journey to leverage telehealth and other high-value digital health care, VHA leaders are collaborating with others—including the AMA—to create resources and share knowledge as digital health care continues to play a bigger role in physicians and patients’ lives.

That has included working with organizations such as the Digital Medicine Society (DiME) “to really think about not just what the VA is doing internally and how we can do it better in the arena of digital health—but how can we really engage and partner outside of our walls?” said Arash Harzand, MD.

Dr. Harzand is a senior innovation fellow at the Veterans Administration (VA) Office of Healthcare Innovation and Learning in Atlanta, and recently discussed leveraging high-value digital health solutions during an appearance on “AMA Update.”

Collaboration leads to new playbook

A recent product of such collaboration efforts is “The Playbook: Digital Health Care Edition” that the VHA and DiMe published after collaborating with the AMA and others.

The free online resource includes eight digital health solutions with case studies that physicians and health systems can adapt to help leverage telehealth and other high-value digital health solutions that increase efficiencies and improve care for patients, physicians and health systems.

Digital therapeutics, the EHR, mobile health applications, connected-sensor technology and virtual care are among the digital health tools discussed in the playbook. And the resource includes a
spotlight on the AMA Telehealth Implementation Playbook that helps teach physicians and others how to prepare for telehealth, implement it and scale it.

In the coming year, the VHA and DiMe are planning to add a second phase of their playbook to add information on adopting and deploying resources, and a third phase covering an evaluation framework.

It’s “been the first kind of foray into us really trying to embrace the world, the digital world that’s sort of evolving and growing outside of our walls,” Dr. Harzand said.

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.

**Adopt tech for a reason**

It is important for health care organizations of any size to be solution-driven, problem-focused cultures where technology is adopted with a specific purpose and a goal that can be measured.

“Just because it's expensive and new—as we all know, that doesn't translate to value. In most cases, it translates just to more cost,” he said. “We have to be really intentional in what we focus on and what we adopt.”

New initiatives need to start slowly and scale up—crawl, walk and then run, Dr. Harzand said.

“All of us want to just start running, right?” he said. “And we're sort of bred like that …but we have to really start small to demonstrate the feasibility and the need before you can start to scale.”

“AMA Update” covers health care topics affecting the lives of physicians and patients. Hear from physicians and experts on public health, advocacy issues, scope of practice and more—because who’s doing the talking matters. You can catch every episode by subscribing to the AMA’s YouTube channel or the audio-only podcast version, which also features educational presentations and in-depth discussions.