![AMA American Medical Association]

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Connecting Promise and Practice: The Trajectory of Digitally Enabled Care

Webinar takeaways, additional resources and more!

In March 2023, the American Medical Association (AMA) hosted a **webinar** that addressed how health care can and must evolve to address the growing disparity between patient volume and clinician availability. This summary highlights the key factors to consider and offers additional resources to dive even deeper into this exciting topic.

The Experts

Joe Kvedar, MD

Dr. Kvedar is the co-chair of the AMA's Digital Medicine Payment Advisory Group (DMPAG), a member of the Association of American Medical Colleges Telehealth Committee, and the immediate past president of the Board of the American Telemedicine Association.

> " We've come a long way, but we have an amazingly long way to go."
>
> Joe Kvedar, MD

Zach Hochstetler

Zach is the director of Editorial Regulatory Affairs at the AMA and secretary of the CPT® Editorial Panel.

Our Host

Lori Prestesater

Lori is the senior vice president of Health Solutions at the AMA.

Digital Health Care in 2023

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, adoption of digital medicine services struggled due to limited payment and coverage. The Digital Medicine Payment Advisory Group (DMPAG) and the Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Editorial Panel quickly made it possible for physicians and patients to connect more easily through telehealth visits. The results have been stunning.

The percentage of telehealth visits has increased from 0.2% in 2019 to a consistent 5% over the past 18 months—a 24-fold increase in less than three years.

> "Digital medicine services saw sharp increases immediately following the pandemic, leveling off at a much higher incidence than prior to the pandemic."
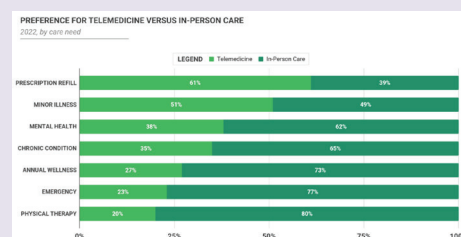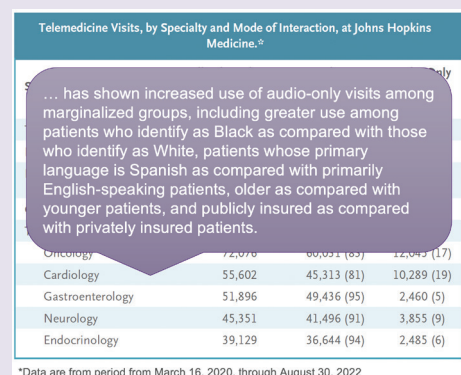
— Zach Hochstetler

Image source: AMA
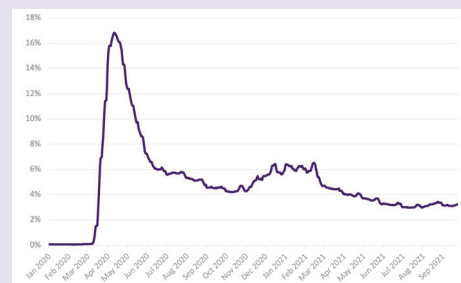
Insurers are seeing more telehealth claims related to minor illnesses, behavioral health and other simple healthcare interactions.

> "The idea that you can do something that doesn't require an enormous amount of emotional connection with your provider this easily and conveniently really resonates with patients."
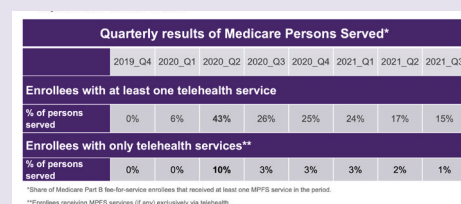
— Joe Kvedar, MD

PREFERENCE FOR TELEMEDICINE VERSUS IN-PERSON CARE
2022, by care need

Image source: Rock Health
https://rockhealth.com/insights/consumer-adoption-of-digital-health-in-2022-moving-at-the-speed-of-trust/ Accessed July 5, 2023.

Digital medicine, especially telemedicine services, has played a critical role in improving health equity. In particular, the increased use of audio-only visits has impacted patients in marginalized groups such as those who identify as Black, whose primary language is Spanish, who are older, and/or who are publicly insured.

Telemedicine Visits, by Specialty and Mode of Interaction, at Johns Hopkins Medicine.*

… has shown increased use of audio-only visits among marginalized groups, including greater use among patients who identify as Black as compared with those who identify as White, patients whose primary language is Spanish as compared with primarily English-speaking patients, older as compared with younger patients, and publicly insured as compared with privately insured patients.

*Data are from period from March 16, 2020, through August 30, 2022

Image source: AMA

Medicare utilization increased during the pandemic and has leveled out with a considerable percentage of enrollees utilizing at least one telehealth service. Remote physiologic monitoring (RPM) and eConsults are the two most commonly used digitally enabled healthcare services by Medicare enrollees.
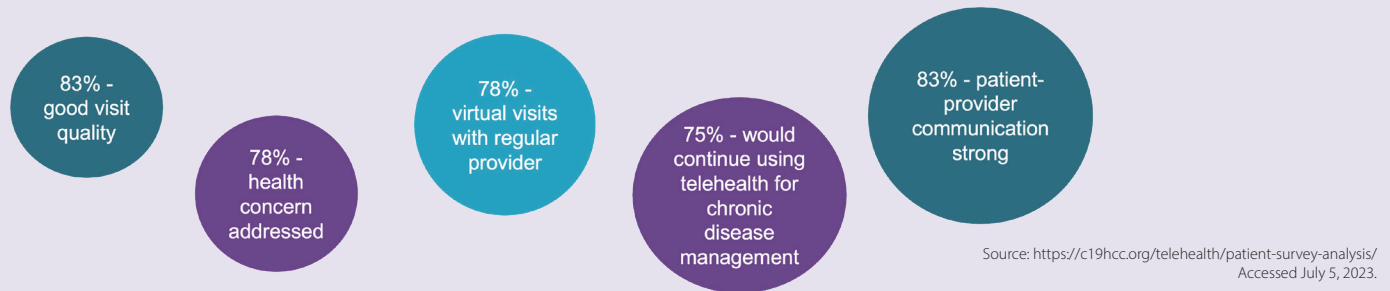
Quarterly results of Medicare Persons Served*								
	2019_Q4	2020_Q1	2020_Q2	2020_Q3	2020_Q4	2021_Q1	2021_Q2	2021_Q3
Enrollees with at least one telehealth service								
% of persons served	0%	6%	43%	26%	25%	24%	17%	15%
Enrollees with only telehealth services**								
% of persons served	0%	0%	10%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%

*Share of Medicare Part B fee-for-service enrollees that received at least one MPFS service in the period.
**Enrollees receiving MPFS services (if any) exclusively via telehealth.

Image source: AMA

Telehealth is still a one-to-one care delivery model. It does not solve for patients' limited time with their physician or physician burnout—especially with anticipated demand over the next 30 years. By 2050, 16% of the world's population will be 65 or older. As patients get older, they need more health care. This creates the need for more digital enablement.

Stakeholders Have Mixed Feelings About More Digital Enablement

According to Dr. Kvedar, "the health care delivery system of the future [must be] one to many," meaning the continuation of telehealth and expansion into more digitally enabled care. Making the case for more digital enablement requires stakeholder alignment and answers to key questions.

Patients are enthusiastic about more digitally enabled care.
From a patient's perspective, digital enablement makes health care more consumable and convenient.
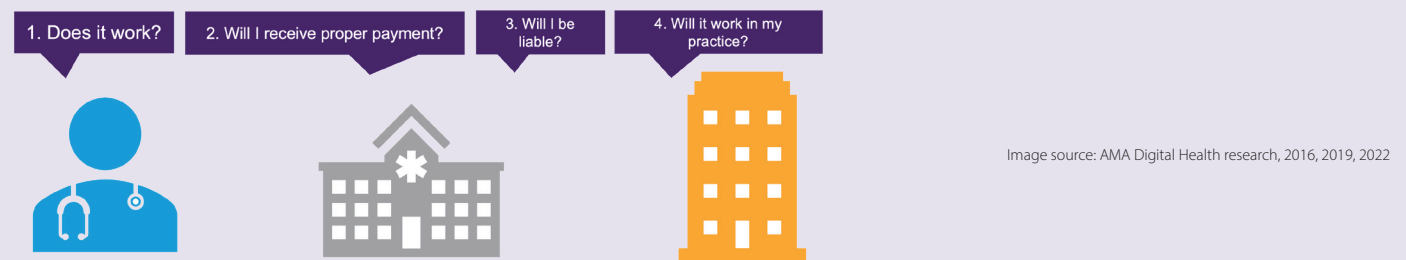
- 83% - good visit quality
- 78% - health concern addressed
- 78% - virtual visits with regular provider
- 75% - would continue using telehealth for chronic disease management
- 83% - patient-provider communication strong

Source: https://c19hcc.org/telehealth/patient-survey-analysis/
Accessed July 5, 2023.

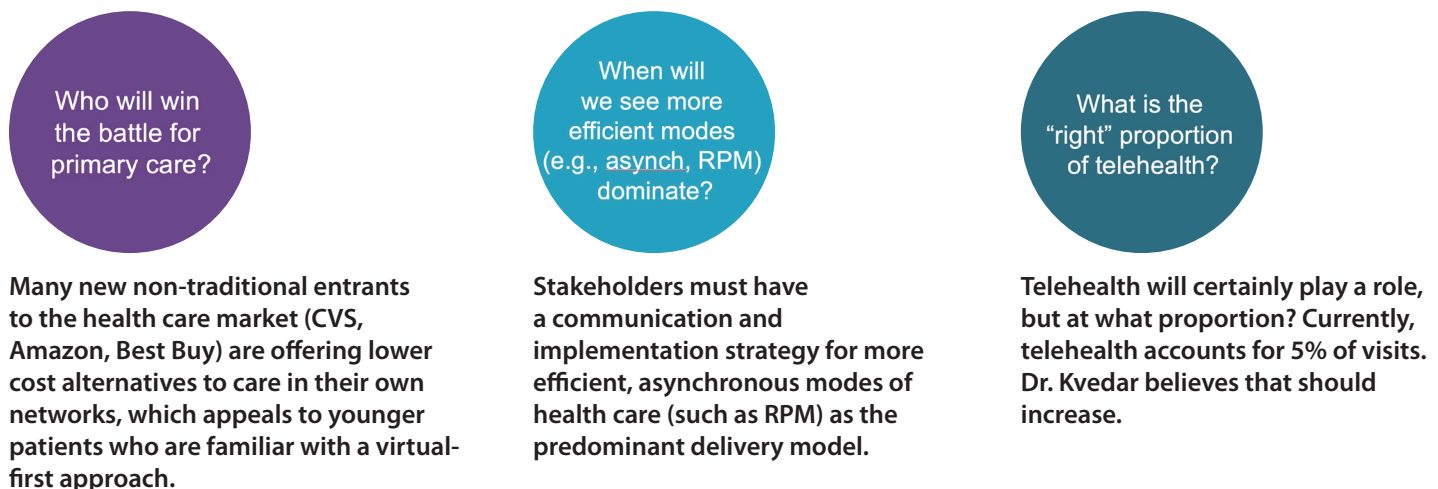**Payers are concerned about utilization and fraud related to more digitally enabled care.**
Insurers want to deliver the best health care experience to their members, but they have concerns.

Physicians need to know more about how more digitally enabled care will impact them.
Establishing a path for reimbursement for telehealth and other digitally enabled services that goes beyond the next couple of years is critical. There is also concern about lower reimbursement for the delivery of digitally enabled care.

1. Does it work?
2. Will I receive proper payment?
3. Will I be liable?
4. Will it work in my practice?

Image source: AMA Digital Health research, 2016, 2019, 2022

Three important questions need to be answered as well:

Who will win the battle for primary care?

Many new non-traditional entrants to the health care market (CVS, Amazon, Best Buy) are offering lower cost alternatives to care in their own networks, which appeals to younger patients who are familiar with a virtual-first approach.

When will we see more efficient modes (e.g., asynch, RPM) dominate?

Stakeholders must have a communication and implementation strategy for more efficient, asynchronous modes of health care (such as RPM) as the predominant delivery model.

What is the "right" proportion of telehealth?

Telehealth will certainly play a role, but at what proportion? Currently, telehealth accounts for 5% of visits. Dr. Kvedar believes that should increase.

The AMA is Working to Ensure Interoperability

Both the AMA and the CPT Editorial Panel are working to ensure that the healthcare stakeholder community understands these services and how to define them.

> "We think it's key to provide common definitions across different healthcare stakeholders that are reviewing medical services for all thinking and speaking through the same terminology. It also helps us better assist physicians in adopting these services as well as create services that are accurately descriptive of the actual services being provided."
>
> Zach Hochstetler

The AMA is actively responding to new opportunities for digitally enabled care by establishing new provider codes for digitally enabled services through the CPT Editorial process. The March 2023 CPT Webinar, "Connecting Promise & Practice: The Trajectory of Digitally Enabled Care" details these efforts in areas that include:

- Remote Therapeutic Monitoring (RTM) and eVisits
- Audio-only modifier 93 for reporting medical services
- AI/Digital medicine definitions
- Continued AMA advocacy and CPT codes

CPT Appendix R: Digital Medicine Services Taxonomy highlights the four physician work categories for providing digital services.

- Physician-to-Patient Services (e.g., visit)
- Physician-to-Physician Services (e.g., consultation)
- Patient Monitoring Services
- Digital Diagnostic Services

CPT Appendix S: AI taxonomy for medical services and procedures provides and defines distinct categories to describe the work done by a machine on behalf of a physician.

- "Assistive" detects clinically relevant data.
- "Augmentative" analyses and/or quantifies data in a clinically meaningful way.
- "Autonomous" interprets data and independently generates clinically meaningful conclusions.

For more information check out: ama-assn.org/cpt-AI-taxonomy

The CPT Editorial Panel has recently approved CPT codes that help define digitally- and AI-enabled care in three areas:

- Coronary fractional flow reserve
- Assistive algorithmic electrocadiogram
- Remote retinal imaging

Building a Digital Healthcare Strategy

There's no question that telehealth has become a household word, which is a triumph. And the journey is just beginning. Dr. Kvedar highlighted the three key competencies needed to build a digital strategy in the delivery system.

Digital Strategy Core Competency: Change Management

Change management is essential to building a digital strategy. Historically, clinicians have visited patients in their homes or patients have visited clinicians in their offices. This centuries-old paradigm is changing, and it's important to support the transition process.

" *"You have to be willing to invest in teams of people to do change management.."*

Digital Strategy Core Competency: Clearly Aligned Goals

In order to build and implement a digital strategy, stakeholders need to know what they are trying to achieve. Otherwise, they'll never know if they have accomplished what they set out to do.

" *"Determine what it is that you're trying to achieve, set some clear goals, have a strategy, and make sure that all your executives are aligned and on board."*

Digital Strategy Core Competency: IT Team Involvement

It is not enough to simply engage your leadership. A successful digitally enabled care strategy requires active involvement from your IT team.

" *"You're often reaching into people's homes through a variety of connections. So, you really want to make sure that your IT team is on board."*

" "We've created a floor, not a ceiling. There's so much more innovating that needs to be done in this space of combining how we deliver care using technology with how we deliver care in a face-to-face office environment."
Joe Kvedar, MD

Learn More with These Resources:

- **CPT Webinar | Connecting Promise and Practice: The Trajectory of Digitally Enabled Care**
- **Future of Health Report**
- **Physician Innovation Network**
- **CPT Appendix S: AI taxonomy for medical services and procedures**
- **CPT Developer Program**
- **CPT Dev Chat sessions**