

Telehealth

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Simply stated, telehealth is the delivery of healthcare via the use of technology. “You may hear other similar terms such as telemedicine, e-health, connected health and health telematics – we consider the differences between these terms to be so minor that they are essentially equivalent. The important common thread between all of these terms is that technology is used to break down barriers of geography and access to health care and education.”¹ Although other organizations, such as the American Telemedicine Association (2016), state that telemedicine refers to implementation of medical care using clinical information, while telehealth treatment may be implemented through symptomatic information only. Health information technology (HIT) closely aligns with telemedicine, however, HIT frequently relates to electronic medical records and transfer of information while telemedicine refers to clinical diagnoses.

Telehealth can be provided in a myriad of different ways ranging from IoT devices, video conference calls, phone calls, and robotics, to name a few. Benefits of the applications of telehealth are convenience for consumers, along with access for individuals in rural areas or where there may be a lack of care in a certain specialty. Videos demonstrating various implementations or functionalities of telemedicine are provided below.

- Virtual Doctor Visits



- Home Healthcare



- Monitoring Healthcare



- Aging in Place



- Hospital care



- Internet of Things



- Robotic Surgery



- Wearables



¹ University of Miami Miller School of Medicine (2016). <http://telehealth.med.miami.edu/what-is-telehealth>

The future of healthcare will inevitably include technology and nearly all of these capabilities will require high-speed broadband Internet access for functionality. The connectivity needed will continue to increase in leaps and bounds in order for the various devices and technologies to operate properly. Fiber-based broadband is essential to healthcare keeping up with current technology in the hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, physicians' offices, and patient homes.

There are various initiatives and legislation regarding telehealth. According to the American Telemedicine Organization (2016), 30 states, along with the District of Columbia, have enacted telemedicine parity laws which require insurance companies to treat telemedicine services equally to traditional services. Telemedicine parity laws direct whether insurance companies will cover services, what services they will cover, and incidentally determine who has access to telehealth. The state of Florida has yet to enact a parity law, so those residents interested would need to contact their insurance company to determine if services are covered. Some insurance companies currently cover telemedicine services or are interested in beginning to do so, therefore, investigation could serve to be fruitful.

Telemedicine legislation also determines whether a physician in one state can treat individuals remotely in other states or regions. In general, physicians must have the proper licensure in the state of the patient to provide medical care to individuals in other states. In addition, state medical boards determine the requirements for prescribing medication based on a telemedicine diagnosis. According to the American Medical Association², Florida has the following requirements regarding prescriptions due to telemedicine appointments:

Telemedicine technology used to prescribe medication must be able to convey the information necessary to meet the standard of care used for in-person encounters, and physicians are responsible for the quality of this technology. Controlled substances may not be prescribed through telemedicine. Patient relationships can be established through telemedicine alone. Fla. Admin. Code R.64B8-9.014.

Therefore, while you may receive prescriptions from a telemedicine appointment, this physician had better have known you prior to the appointment in question to demonstrate a patient relationship.

In addition, the Federal Communications Commission announced a Connect2Health Task Force in 2014 with the goal of "accelerating the adoption of health care technologies by leveraging broadband and the other next-gen communications services"³ The vision of this task force is having "Everyone connected ... to the people, services and information they need to get well and stay healthy through robust connections, integrated and seamless care, smart policy making, and empowered and engaged consumers."⁴

² American Medical Association (2016). Physician Resources. <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/legal-topics/faqs.page>

³ Federal Communications Commission (March 4, 2014). FCC Chairman Announces New Connect2Health Task Force. FCC News Release.

⁴ Federal Communications Commission (2016). Connect2HealthFCC. <https://www.fcc.gov/general/connect2healthfcc-mission-and-vision>