

## TELEHEALTH EVOLVES: 3 ways comprehensive virtual care helps health plans, and their members, with complex health challenges



**Today, comprehensive virtual care is being used to reduce unnecessary and ineffective care, equitably improve outcomes, and support payer-provider collaboration.**

The value of comprehensive virtual care, and its ability to provide access to high-quality care across populations, is felt throughout the healthcare ecosystem. Whether on its own, or in conjunction with more-traditional care, a comprehensive virtual care strategy can include a range

of expert medical services to support the identification and management of complex conditions, including those with a behavioral health component, chronic pain, musculoskeletal issue, gastrointestinal disease, cancer, and more.

## Building member-centric virtual services allows health plans to better serve their clients and plan members in three ways:

### 1

**Reduce expensive, unnecessary, and ineffective care.** An expert medical review, delivered virtually, is proven to reduce the use of high-cost settings such as emergency rooms, surgical centers, and urgent care facilities. A 2018 health plan claims analysis study by Teladoc Health revealed that there was a 25% to 34%<sup>1</sup> reduction in the utilization of acute care and high-cost settings as a result of expert medical review interventions. Expert medical reviews may also include a recommendation for lower-cost medications with similar efficacies.

Overall, according to the Teladoc Health study, members who adhered to expert recommendations saw a per-case savings of approximately \$36,000. When members did not follow the recommendations, costs were five times greater.

In one specific case, a 65-year-old diagnosed with ulcerative colitis lost more than 40 pounds in a single year, despite trying a variety of medications and therapies. When she was later diagnosed as also having Crohn's disease, her array of medications further increased with no improvements. Following a methodic review of her case, the Best Doctors team of experts at Teladoc Health confirmed her severe ulcerative colitis diagnosis while simultaneously discovering that she did not actually have Crohn's disease. Armed with this information, she followed her new treatment plan that included the elimination of expensive biologics. By focusing on the correct diagnosis and avoiding unnecessary and potentially harmful medications, her condition improved significantly, and the cost avoidance totaled nearly \$100,000.

<sup>1</sup>Teladoc Health. 2019. "Whitepaper: Health Plan Claims Analysis Study."

## 2

**Equitably improve outcomes.** Virtual care can level the playing field. When the son of a prominent health plan's CEO became ill, doctors could not identify the cause. Only when the CEO brought together top experts from nearby healthcare organizations to review his son's records did they discover he was suffering from exposure to black mold.

"Not everyone has the same access to top-notch healthcare. Until he pulled together the right experts, who sat down and comprehensively reviewed the information, they could not figure it out," says Chad Baugh, Vice President of Client Management at Teladoc Health. "Comprehensive virtual care consistently and equitably delivers this level of expert care."

Virtual expert medical services improve outcomes and quality of life for members by granting equitable access to expert care.

## 3

**Support payer-provider collaboration.** In today's fast-paced fee-for-service healthcare system, physicians are not incentivized to take the time to think through the complexities of challenging cases to optimize care. A clinically collaborative partnership with an integrated virtual approach can expand the treating team's capabilities—ensuring well-informed medical decisions and delivery of the best possible care.

"With the support of virtual expert medical services, we can treat the patient more efficiently and effectively, getting to a better outcome in a shorter period. And we're able to reduce readmissions," says Lawrence Swink, MD, a primary care physician at Columbia Medical Practice in Columbia, Md, and a strong advocate of Teladoc Health's expert medical review service.

## Conclusion

According to the Deloitte 2018 surveys of U.S. healthcare consumers and physicians, consumers are most drawn to the convenience and access of virtual care (64%), while physicians are motivated by how it improves access to patient care (66%). Comprehensive virtual care helps competitive health plans be more strategic, while facilitating the delivery of high-quality care for improved outcomes at a lower cost.

**"If you're looking for an initiative that has defined results with a positive impact, you've got to look at virtual care," says Baugh. "Comprehensive virtual care has the potential to dramatically change our healthcare system."**

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