

Maximizing Virtual Care in 2021

How healthcare providers can easily
innovate and advance their practices in
a consumer-driven environment

A vertical white dashed line runs down the left side of the page, starting below the subtitle and extending to the bottom.

The new era of healthcare consumerism

The consumerization of healthcare—marked by convenience, digital channels and a more engaging relationship between patients and their doctors—has been on its way for years. But the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this demand significantly.

To succeed in the new era of healthcare consumerism, it's all about Virtual Care.

Virtual Care [vur-choo-uhl] [kair]



All the different ways that healthcare providers use digital tools to communicate and remotely interact with patients. **This can include everything from telehealth and text messaging to secure text to exchange information.**

Many practices began their virtual care journey by adopting telehealth in 2020 — and growth in telehealth will certainly continue, with providers expecting to increase the percentage of visits offered via telehealth in 2021 by 10-25%. Further, analysts forecast that the global telehealth market will reach nearly \$50 billion in 2021¹.

But there is much more to virtual care than just Video Chat. Implementing a full virtual care strategy that sets practices up for success long-term requires a custom, rather than a one-size-fits all, approach that is tailored to the practice's specific needs and creates the ideal experience for their patients. Looking forward, the delivery of healthcare will never be the same. And for good reason.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2020 Virtual Care recap
- The road ahead: Implementing a full virtual care strategy
- Directions: a roadmap to virtual care implementation
- Conclusion
- Survey methodology
- Resources

Introduction

Updox surveyed more than 1,000 healthcare providers across a variety of specialty practice areas to better understand how virtual care impacted providers and their respective practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, their plans for developing a virtual care strategy in 2021 and beyond, and what barriers still exist in relation to digital health technology product adoption and implementation. The findings highlight how the perception and use of virtual care has shifted dramatically since 2020 and how new challenges have emerged that the industry must address to support healthcare practices as they adopt a full virtual care strategy moving forward.

2020 Virtual Care Recap

In 2020, nearly half of healthcare providers implemented new digital solutions to improve patient engagement and increase workflow efficiency. In fact, more than 65% state their practice already has a virtual care strategy in place for at least one solution, and 48% have implemented one or more virtual care solutions in order to be more productive, engage with more patients and run a more profitable practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Specifically, the three virtual care solutions that providers felt had the greatest impact on their practice in 2020 were Video Chat (telehealth), Electronic Fax and Electronic Forms.

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth offered a lifeline to many providers as they sought new ways to continue seeing patients despite lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. Patients, too, appreciated the convenience and safety that telehealth provided, as a video visit enabled them to speak with their doctor of choice without having to worry about being exposed to other potentially sick patients ².

65%

of providers have a virtual care strategy in place for at least one solution

Electronic Fax and Electronic Forms solutions were implemented as practices identified new ways to optimize remote work for staff, reduce costs and paper use, and also streamline patient communications, creating a contactless experience for patients and alleviating workflow inefficiencies for practices. At a time when many healthcare practices were facing financial hardships and receiving an influx of patient questions, it's to little surprise these tools proved to have a great impact ³.

Looking ahead to healthcare in 2021 and beyond, these solutions remain among the top that providers believe will continue to have the greatest impact on their practices.

Despite the advantages of such digital tools, however, many practices continue to face barriers to adoption and implementation of a full virtual care strategy—or simply do not know where to go from here. In order for providers to further innovate and move full speed ahead in a consumer-driven healthcare environment, these obstacles must be overcome.

The Road Ahead



Implementing a Full Virtual Care Strategy

With overall costs, insurance reimbursement and strain on physicians and staff among the top challenges practices cite for product implementation and adoption now and looking forward, it's time to address these issues head-on.



of today's providers say it's important/very important to have a full virtual care strategy

While 75% of today's providers say it's important/very important to have a full virtual care strategy moving forward, only 28% have actually implemented one. Moreover, only 14% of practices have discussed implementing a full strategy, with 57% having yet to discuss it at all.

Running a profitable practice/business is the #1 priority for healthcare providers in 2021 (39%)—behind increasing patient satisfaction (33%) and improving patient outcomes (16%). Implementing a full virtual care strategy is critical to achieving these goals and emerging from 2020 stronger than ever.

Interestingly, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the number one barrier providers faced when adopting new digital tools was patient comfort level with tech. The pandemic changed this drastically, with patients now demanding such technology ⁴.



“Transformation (and not just digital) will continue on a grander scale, bringing forth greater and sustained transformation across all healthcare settings. The word ‘digital’ will fall to the wayside as we adjust to a new normal and digital consumer experiences and the digital back office just blends into healthcare⁵.”

According to the Updox survey, patient and provider needs shifted throughout 2020. Patients' comfort level with technology ceased to become an issue during COVID as practices adjusted to the new normal. However, providers are now experiencing new challenges as they look to further innovate, meet patient demands and grow their practices in the year ahead.

Pre-COVID Technology Product Implementation Challenges

- Patient comfort level with tech (32%)
- Costs associated with the initial purchase/implementation (26%)
- Insurance reimbursement (21%)

Throughout COVID-19 Challenges

- Costs associated with initial purchase/implementation (30%)
- Strain on physicians and other staff (i.e., learning curve, training, perceived additional work, etc.) (25%)
- Insurance reimbursement (20%)

Challenges Looking Ahead

- Costs associated with initial purchase/implementation (32%)
- Insurance reimbursement (30%)
- Strain on physicians and other staff (i.e., learning curve, training, perceived additional work, etc.) (15%)



A Roadmap to Virtual Care Implementation

Building a virtual care strategy should not be a race.

Rather, this is a slow, steady process, with providers identifying their needs, setting tangible goals for the practice and building on their strategy piece by piece. A practice can start anywhere, even with just one solution, based on specific needs and patient demands. In a virtual care journey, there is no final destination. As provider and patient needs evolve, so, too, must your virtual care strategy.

There are best practices to building a long-term virtual care strategy. **We've created a roadmap for you to follow:**

- ✓ Optimize Telehealth
- ✓ Promote Health Services
- ✓ Keep Schedules Full
- ✓ Create Contactless Check-in Process
- ✓ Move Towards A Paperless Practice

We've created a roadmap for you to follow:



1. Telehealth, the most in-demand virtual care solution, can be utilized at an even higher rate in 2021 and beyond to provide optimal care and lower practice costs. In fact, many practices plan to provide new offerings and visit types for telehealth looking forward, such as for sick visits and medication management. If you are not already utilizing telehealth, now is a good time to start.



2. To get the word out and alert patients they are due for a visit, and to update them on your telehealth, COVID-19 vaccine availability and other unique service offerings, broadcast patient messaging can be leveraged to easily reach and connect with your patient base—without overwhelming staff time—through personalized communications that assist in increasing patient engagement and generating practice revenue.



3. As a result of a broadcast message, patients can easily request and sign up for an in-office or telehealth visit. With a quick, HIPAA-compliant Secure Text, staff can then send confirmation of the visit (date, time and other needed info) in a manner that's proven to keep schedules full and increase staff productivity by 30%. To further beat the odds of patient no-shows, which can cost the average practice up to \$42,000 a year, the day before the visit, send a quick patient reminder regarding the upcoming appointment.



4. On the day of the visit, regardless of whether the appointment will be conducted in-person or via telehealth, provide patients with a completely Contactless Check-In experience. You can use Electronic Forms to eliminate errors associated with manual entry from paper to computer, automate the check-in process, and increase patient satisfaction through easily accessible online forms. Once all of the patient's electronic forms are filled out and they are fully checked in, telehealth patients can be quickly sent to a virtual Waiting Room accessed from their smartphone, while in-office patients simply alert the practice of their arrival prior to receiving their care.



5. On average, healthcare providers can spend upwards of 55 hours manually faxing each month, and for every 5,000 fax pages sent or received, a practice spends an average of \$155 in supplies. After appointments, utilize electronic faxing to streamline document sharing and alleviate unnecessary back-and-forth with other members of a patient's care team, reducing costs while improving the practice's overall workflow and efficiency through online editing, tags, queues and notifications. Creating a fax-free office is one major step to building a truly paperless practice⁶.



Full Virtual Care Strategy



Conclusion

The Updox Communication Platform helps practices like yours easily implement virtual care solutions so you can focus on what matters most—your patients. Updox is the only place to manage all your work and communication to ensure safe and efficient care. From one consolidated inbox, Updox provides HIPAA-compliant solutions that enhance the patient experience, boost office productivity and drive organizational profitability.

To learn more about Updox, our platform, and suite of solutions, which are available to providers on a month-to-month basis with no long-term contracts, please visit www.updox.com/healthcare-crm

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Updox surveyed more than 1,000 healthcare providers to determine how virtual care impacted their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, their plans for developing a virtual care strategy in 2021 and beyond, and what barriers still existed in relation to product adoption and implementation.

A majority of respondents are office staff or physicians practicing at solo/independent practices and using at least one solution within the Updox platform.

REFERENCES

- 1 - <https://www.healthcareitnews.com/blog/frost-sullivans-top-10-predictions-healthcare-2021>
- 2 - <https://blog.updox.com/company/news-press-releases/updox-telehealth-patient-survey>
- 3 - <https://blog.updox.com/updox-resources/updox-customer-survey-economics-of-covid>
- 4 - <https://blog.updox.com/updox-resources/healthcare-technology-2021-virtual-care-predictions>
- 5 - <https://go.forrester.com/blogs/healthcare-predictions-2021/>
- 6 - <https://blog.updox.com/updox-resources/create-secure-paperless-healthcare-practice-online-fax>