

EMBRACING TELEHEALTH FOR NUTRITIONAL SERVICES DURING COVID-19

A Case Study

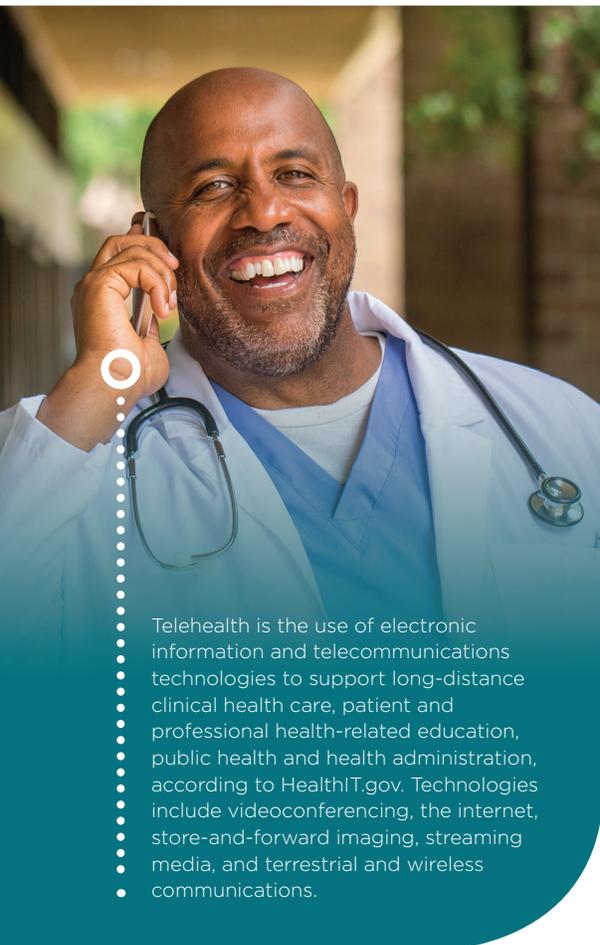
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COVID-19 has caused a massive acceleration in the use of telehealth. Consumer adoption has skyrocketed, from 11% of U.S. consumers using telehealth in 2019 to 46% of consumers now using telehealth to replace canceled healthcare visits.”

—MCKINSEY: “Telehealth: A quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID-19 reality?”



Telehealth is the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration, according to HealthIT.gov. Technologies include videoconferencing, the internet, store-and-forward imaging, streaming media, and terrestrial and wireless communications.

PRE-COVID-19 — A Look Back

Before COVID-19, telehealth was languishing. Although telehealth has been around for several decades, both providers and patients have not fully embraced the technology. Research points to a disconnect between interest in telehealth and usage. While 7 out of 10 people (66%) said they were interested in the technology, fewer than 1 in 10 had tried it (8%).¹

One reason for the disconnect is likely that providers did not adequately promote telehealth. Research shows that only 23% of internal and family physicians offered their patients video visits. Meanwhile only 6% of patients said their doctors offered them this option.¹

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States in early 2020, many healthcare facilities had to pivot from in-person nutritional service visits to telehealth virtual visits. The positive response was beyond the expectations of both healthcare providers and their patients.

In mid-March 2020, outpatient medical nutrition therapy was paused at several healthcare organizations across the U.S. due to COVID-19. In many healthcare organizations, counseling appointments were allowed to resume in early April, but only as a telehealth service where Registered Dietitians met with patients remotely via online appointments on smartphones, computers or tablets.

The outcome has been a newfound appreciation for the virtual healthcare delivery system — for both providers and their patients — so much so, that healthcare organizations are now viewing telehealth as the way forward in medical care in many disciplines. Medicare regulations and restrictions were even lifted to facilitate patient-to-practitioner interactions.



Due to an unprecedented level of provider adoption and consumer interest, the predicted growth of virtual patient visits is expected to reach 1 billion people in 2020.¹

REGISTERED DIETITIAN NUTRITIONISTS (RDNS) REPORT BENEFITS WITH TELEHEALTH SERVICES

RDNs have expressed a wide variety of opinions on telehealth, including believing they do as good a job with telehealth as they do in person. They also report video consultations are better than in-person or phone visits for assessing patients' levels of understanding thanks to the ability to read body language. Overall, they like this new way of providing nutrition therapy, find tele-visits rewarding and are excited about the future of virtual nutritional consultations.

According to RDNs, telehealth advantages over in-person visits include the following:



Efficiency

— getting to know the patient better and getting to the point of visits quicker



Patient interaction

— patient shares more truthful information with them



Convenience

— patients don't have to travel to attend their appointments



Educational

— easy to review medical plans, journals, food labels and medicines together



Depth

— calls are a little longer than in-person allowing more time to discuss issues



Comfort level

— patients seem more relaxed in their own environments



Less stress

— avoiding the stress of being weighed and focusing on non-weight issues such as how clothes fit



Childcare

— patients with children can continue caring for them in the comfort of their homes



Patient experience

— patients are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of virtual interactions with their care providers

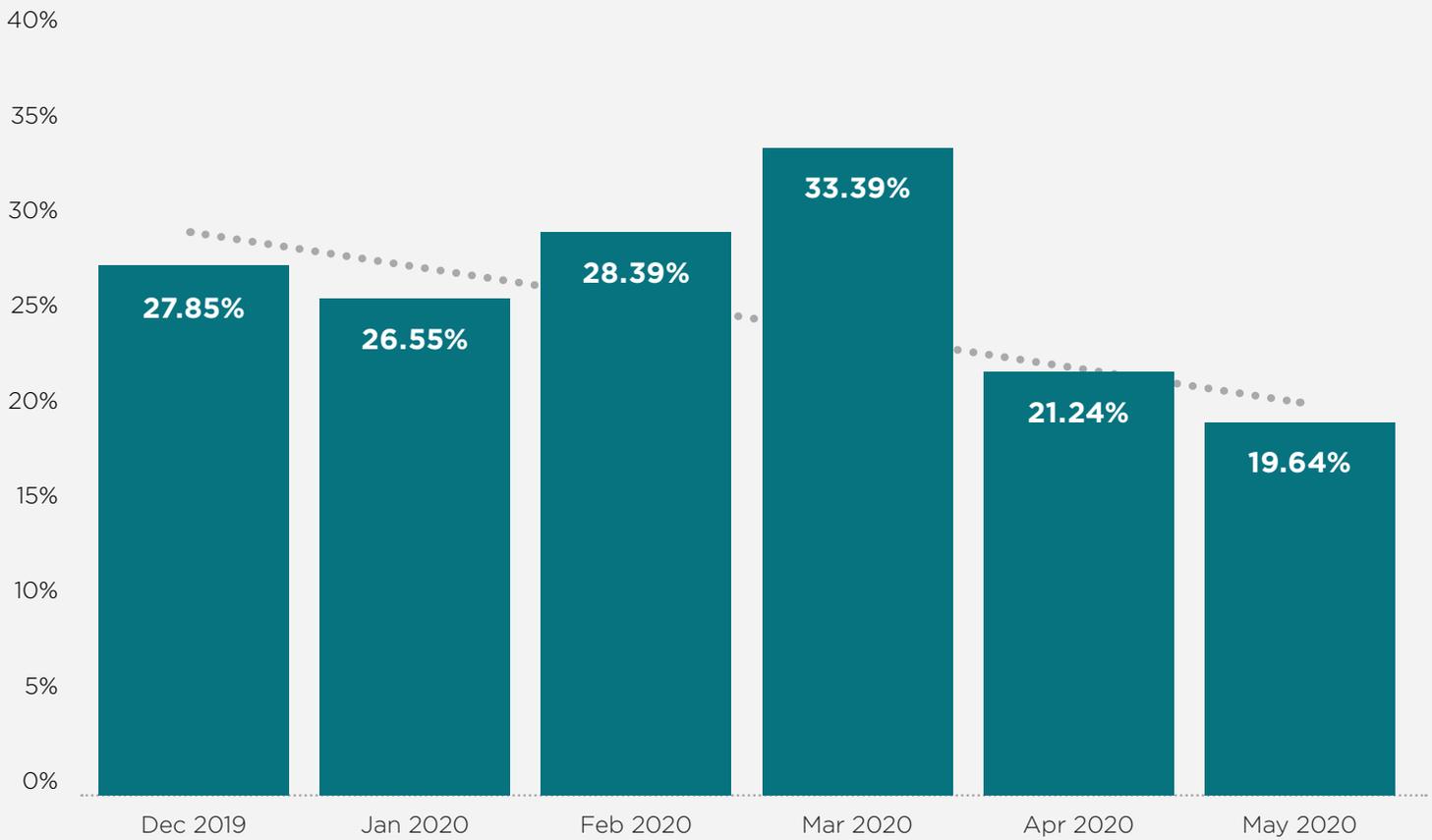


Provide rural areas much needed access

— more patients in more areas can gain access to telehealth services



Average Cancellation & No Show Rates⁴



The advantages of telehealth have led to a significant drop in no-show rates for outpatient services. Across all facilities analyzed, the no-show rates went up in March due to COVID-19 but decreased as accounts began to offer telehealth services.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



I can't imagine going back... People recognize the value of this, so it seems like it would not be a good thing to force our beneficiaries to go back to in-person visits."

—RDN



RDNs share their telehealth patient visit experiences with Aramark

During its research, conducted from December 2019 to May 2020 that included patients' no-show and cancellation rates, Aramark went to the source to better understand the impact of telehealth on dietitians. One goal was to discover how to create a smooth and successful transition from in-person patient visits to virtual visits. Here are some of their comments:

-  "Prior to telehealth [usage during COVID-19], our no-show rate was 50% for diabetics and 75% for bariatrics. Now 100% of the patients are showing up for their appointments."
-  "High-risk patient groups like those in heart failure clinics are happy to have access to providers and the care team because many feel uncomfortable leaving their homes. Many of these patients are on lockdown at their residence (senior centers or assisted living), so telehealth has been their only option."
-  "Telehealth has increased our reach to clients and eliminated many of the barriers of coming to the facilities for appointments, such as finding parking in a garage, navigating a large hospital campus and waiting in registration. Clients can fit more time in for the appointment because they are eliminating the time invested just to show up. Also, our clients who live outside of the city area can be more easily connect to an RD."
-  "Patients feel comforted by the fact that their care team is still checking on them — they often ask about how we're doing."
-  "Providing telehealth as an RD has allowed us to provide care to patients in a more realistic and authentic setting. Our patients get to stay in the comfort of their own homes, which allows us to review nutrition labels of foods in their actual pantries and fridge and brainstorm balanced meals. We can also verify the medications and supplements they are taking. Our advice seems to really stick because they are learning from relatable examples within their own home."



With the acceleration of consumer and provider adoption of telehealth and extension of telehealth beyond virtual urgent care, up to \$250B of current U.S. healthcare spend could potentially be virtualized.”

—MCKINSEY: “Telehealth: A quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID-19 reality?”



POST-COVID-19 — A Look Forward

The rate of telehealth use in patient visits today compared to pre-COVID-19 levels has exploded.

- ▶ 50-175x increase in telehealth visits across providers¹
- ▶ 3,500% increase in telehealth claims between February and March 2020²
- ▶ 1,300 providers added to expanded telehealth platform at NYU Langone Health³
- ▶ 4,345% increase in non-urgent telehealth visits from early March to mid-April at NYU Langone Health³

Telehealth is now viewed as an essential tool in patient care. The results of deploying telehealth at a larger volume than ever before include:¹

- 57% of providers view telehealth more favorably than they did before COVID-19
- 64% of providers are more comfortable using telehealth now than before COVID-19
- 74% of telehealth patients report high satisfaction
- 78% of patients who have used telehealth are likely to use the service again in the future

Telehealth has even become an important tool in the fight against COVID-19 — delivering these benefits:

- ▶ Preventing exposure of the virus between healthcare providers and patients
- ▶ Keeping mild cases out of the hospital and giving hospitals time to prep for high-risk cases
- ▶ Reducing the risk of transmission for non-COVID-19-related care
- ▶ Allowing quarantined clinicians to continue providing healthcare services

BEST PRACTICES IN TELEHEALTH SERVICES

With the rapid expansion of telehealth, healthcare facilities are already implementing best practices to maximize clinician capacity and improve patient access, including these:

- ▶ Deploying a secure telehealth platform
- ▶ Training all providers to use telehealth technologies
- ▶ Developing standard operating procedure for virtual visits
- ▶ Integrating, standardizing and templating scheduling
- ▶ Integrating telehealth platforms with EHR systems
- ▶ Promoting telehealth widely through patient portals and outreach

When healthcare facilities had to rapidly pivot to telehealth to meet their patients' needs in early 2020, Aramark helped lead the way to provide the support required to deliver exceptional patient care remotely— partnering with clients to implement the use of available technology platforms. Going forward, Aramark is prepared to continue to support this service as more facilities adopt telehealth to improve patient convenience and access to care, better patient engagement and outcomes and a more efficient healthcare system.

To learn more about how our solutions and programs support your hospital, [contact us today.](#)



References

1. [McKinsey](#): "Telehealth: A quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID-19 reality?"
2. [Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA](#): "Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Telehealth Claims Skyrocket During Coronavirus Pandemic"
3. [Becker's Hospital Review](#): "NYU Langone Health adds 1,300 providers to telemedicine platform"
4. Aramark, Clinical Productivity Portal

