

OPPORTUNITY IS CALLING

ANSWER THE CALL WITH TELEHEALTH

The legislation adjustments caused by COVID-19 cut through much of the red tape around telehealth by adding PTs to the list of providers whom insurance will compensate. Private practice owner Mike Teater, of Camas, WA helped lead the charge to adopting telehealth as a member of a private practice Telehealth Taskforce. He recently shared key insights with S.O. Magazine:

S.O.: What are the benefits of telehealth?

Mike: If someone is sick and can't come into the clinic but can access our services from home – they can stay on track with their care plan. If a patient is traveling, or vacationing (in state), has a sick child or needs to cancel because they can't make it to the facility – these are all ideal scenarios to convert to a virtual visit. There are many applications to improve accessibility to patients and improve clinic metrics. It also helps to reduce cancellations and no shows in the clinic because travel time is removed from the equation for those who “just forgot” and for those who would love to fill a spot-on short notice.

Despite the clear opportunity, many are hesitant to engage because of a lack of confidence in how to embrace the technology.

S.O.: What does a PT need to get started in telehealth?

Mike: To be effective, you'll need digital consent and release forms, digital intake forms, a HIPPA compliant email account and a laptop. Then, you'll need to select a telehealth platform. I piloted 5 different telehealth platforms to see which worked the best. Some didn't work smoothly, some were difficult to navigate, or had lots of bugs and glitches in the software because it is a newer offering. In fact, many available programs are still in the alpha or beta testing stages. My research pointed me to two platforms. I favored: Doxy.

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me and Medbridgeeducation.com. However, my private practice network reviewed many additional platforms and has been able to provide insight into the pros and cons to consider when selecting the option that is right for you. If you don't have the input of an organization like mine to fall back on, start by checking out virtual therapy platforms within your existing EMR solutions compatibility.

S.O.: Any other considerations a practitioner should be aware of?

Mike: Many providers notify clients via email only. If you feel your patient base is capable of operating in this methodology, you will have no problem. Personally, I found that the level of IT knowledge my patient base had varied widely, so SMS Text was a feature I absolutely needed to be successful.

Make sure you have a program that is effective for the initial visit and the follow-ups. As an example, I love the convenience of Doxy.me, and its text capability, but it did not store patient information



in the program which meant I was constantly performing manual lookups of information. It also did not integrate with the exercise program. Before you settle on your platform of choice, make sure the time you save on the front end isn't lost on the follow-up visits. And...

You've Got to Know How to Implement!

Know your regulations, codes and modifiers. Set up your EMR to apply these codes and modifiers. Know what is eligible for reimbursement and be aware of any restrictions for each insurance company. Get that infrastructure in place!

S.O.: What has patient reception been like?

Mike: Widespread adoption may take some time. At the time we are speaking, about 10% of my existing caseload is receptive so far. The level of interest is growing steadily the longer we are shut down. What I have found is that bringing telehealth into the care plan really forces patients to look at themselves and ask what they can do to manage their own health at home. It's an opportunity to be focused on home program management and how we can customize their care plan to work with the tools and resources they already have available.



This is also a chance for the therapist to evaluate their environment and see what they are exposed to in the real world – for instance, what does your workspace look like? Are there any obstacles that increase your fall risk? Overall, we can be more helpful in making recommendations.

S.O.: Will the team require training?

Mike: YES! I've been piloting this program by myself since March, but Medicare just approved the service in early May, so I didn't roll this out to the entire clinic before I knew if reimbursement would

happen for that segment. Now that I am, I can see platforms that provide training and appropriate IT support are really important, because as with anything, issues do come up. Sometimes you have to troubleshoot for the patients too!

My best advice for those just getting started is to practice with a colleague and practice with an existing patient. Get comfortable with the technology so you can help patients and problem solve as needed. I'm fortunate to have a vast network of other FYZICAL members I can lean on, and the entire operations team at FYZICAL for support when I have questions. Whatever you do, don't do it alone...have someone you can ask for help.

The Cheat Sheet

Telehealth is Here to Stay – Make Sure You're Prepared



- 1 Know the Benefits:** Be sure you can articulate the benefits of telehealth to your team, your referral sources and your patients. If you don't truly believe in the program – your constituents will not believe either and participation will suffer.
- 2 Acquire the Necessary Tools:** To be effective, you'll need digital consent and release forms, digital intake forms, a HIPPA compliant email account and a laptop.
- 3 Select a Platform:** Take into account the EMR compatibility, ease of use, cost, and if available, rely on organizations that have tested multiple platforms to determine which is best for your practice.
- 4 Determine the Messaging for Introducing Telehealth:** You must be able to tell both patients and referral sources that you are implementing this type of therapy. "Don't call it telehealth, instead say 'Throughout our therapy we may do a video call, a phone call, or an office visit. Your patient care plan could be comprised of many elements'. Shaping the proper understanding and expectation is key to adoption of telehealth.
- 5 Train Your Team:** Start by allowing them to practice on each other and then move to existing patients that have already built trust and rapport.
- 6 Have a Discussion Plan** for patients that clearly demonstrates why telemedicine is appropriate. You'll need to gain agreement of value for participation.