

REPOSITIONING FOR THE FUTURE WITH TELEHEALTH

By Donna McHale, Jessica Duke and Greg McInturff

To meet the urgent needs and changing preferences of patients, many organizations are investing more time, money and resources in establishing and improving their telehealth offerings. As leaders look to the future, they are re-imagining telehealth, not as a point solution, but as a long-term fixture of the organization.

Every organization's vision of the future with telehealth will be different; what matters is defining how telehealth will enable the organization to reposition itself to meet the growing needs of diverse patient populations.

The strategies and tactics organizations have taken to get to this point likely will not be enough to scale and sustain telehealth services for tomorrow. More than merely a decision about technology, the future requires an enterprisewide approach to telehealth. By thoroughly understanding their consumers and carefully considering their options for redesign, leaders can successfully reposition their telehealth programs to meet new demands.

Creating the Vision for the Future

For consumers, providers, lawmakers and payors, the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the collective understanding of what telehealth can do. Now, leaders are thinking beyond what has already been done to use telehealth as a critical tool that fills in the gaps across the care continuum. Such gaps can include increasing safety and comfort by providing [acute care in the home](#), reducing readmissions and preventable emergency room visits with remote monitoring, and enhancing quality of life for patients with chronic conditions or mobility challenges.

Every organization's vision of the future with telehealth will be different; what matters is defining how telehealth will enable the organization to reposition itself to meet the growing needs of diverse patient populations.

Organizational Alignment and Stakeholder Input

Expanding telehealth programs to better serve diverse patient populations requires the alignment of the organization's leadership and its workforce. A culture that is not ready to embrace the expansion of telehealth will likely find itself challenged by suboptimal implementation and use. Leaders can avoid these challenges by considering who across the enterprise will be the most impacted by the expansion. Key stakeholders, such

as physicians, department leaders and technicians, may give insightful perspectives for addressing problems they have encountered with the current telehealth program, improving functionality for both patients and staff, and how best to implement eventual changes. By asking a variety of stakeholders for input, leaders can develop a model for telehealth that works for physicians and staff while also reducing friction in adopting new behaviors and processes across the organization.

Talking to Consumers About Telehealth

Though many consumers are already enjoying telehealth services, there are others who may have accepted telehealth as a necessary means of treatment during specific health episodes but aren't eager to make that the norm. Regardless of individual opinions, consumers as a whole will need consistent education on the value of telehealth and how these services will ultimately deliver the experiences and outcomes consumers want.

Huron's [consumer market research](#) found that while consumers say they are happy with their current provider, more than half are willing to switch providers for greater convenience. This gives providers an opportunity to show consumers how telehealth can be the antidote to healthcare's most common disruptions to daily life, such as waiting rooms, repetitive paperwork, taking time off and making travel arrangements. Providers who demonstrate they not only understand what their consumers want but also have the means to deliver it will be more successful in maintaining positive relationships with consumers, thus securing their loyalty.

Scaling Compliance, Information Security and Digital Trust

Healthcare's regulatory environment is dynamic. As organizations look to the future, many will be challenged to keep up with state and federal

mandates, ensure their telehealth programs remain HIPAA compliant and maintain valid licensure as they develop and grow. To get ahead of regulatory changes, leaders can establish a process for regularly reviewing requirements, guidelines and mandates, and effectively communicating any confirmed or expected changes back to appropriate leadership. From there, the organization can make informed decisions regarding what to change and how, to remain compliant.

Additionally, [digital trust](#) will only become more essential as organizations receive and exchange increased amounts of consumer data. The severity and sophistication of cyberattacks is growing exponentially, making both healthcare leaders and consumers uneasy. To show they can be trusted with private health information across all types of sites of care, organizations will need to prove to all stakeholders that their telehealth programs are safe and that the organization is diligently working behind the scenes to [thwart cyberattacks](#). The erosion of consumer trust and damage to provider reputation resulting from an attack can be devastating to organizations.

Evolving Care Models and Other Considerations

An organization's telehealth care model, including the ratio of face-to-face to virtual services, should be informed by the communities the organization serves and market share. Models that are flexible enough to weather long-term changes and unexpected upsets in the market will give organizations the ability to react to those disruptions and move forward while maintaining exceptional care delivery.

When developing the model, leaders have many factors to consider. First, leaders will want to prioritize investments in technology that not only solve common problems across the organization but also reduce friction for consumers. It may be helpful to look at healthcare organizations

that are succeeding in delivering telehealth, or seek out mutually beneficial partnerships with tech companies, think tanks and local health-based organizations to find innovative ways to better serve consumers. Next, leaders will want to anticipate how the new model will impact metrics and workflows. For metrics, it comes down to which ones are now irrelevant under the new model and which ones are necessary to prove the model is a success. Likewise, the model will require changes to workflows, processes, procedures and behaviors across the organization. Leaders can assist the organization in making these changes by creating a plan for consistent communication and education on new practices. Lastly, leaders have to think about reimbursement. By communicating and collaborating with payors, both entities have a better chance of creating a reimbursement model everyone can agree to.

A future with telehealth will enable providers to meet consumers' rapidly changing needs and preferences while also giving providers flexibility in responding to major market disruption. By proactively redesigning their telehealth programs to be more than temporary fixes, leaders can successfully reposition their organizations to provide trustworthy, reliable and consumer-centric care.

Key Takeaways

To transform the future with telehealth, leaders must:

Think differently.

Look beyond what telehealth has already done to see what it could do.

Plan differently.

Develop a telehealth strategy that aligns to the consumer demands in the organization's service area or market.

Act differently.

Maintain consumer trust, make security a priority and stay current on regulatory shifts.



huronconsultinggroup.com

© 2020 Huron Consulting Group Inc. and affiliates. Huron is a global consultancy and not a CPA firm, and does not provide attest services, audits, or other engagements in accordance with standards established by the AICPA or auditing standards promulgated by the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board ("PCAOB"). Huron is not a law firm; it does not offer, and is not authorized to provide, legal advice or counseling in any jurisdiction. Huron is the trading name of Pope Woodhead & Associates Ltd.

20-1079