



Know Your Benefits

Telemedicine Basics

As technology evolves, doctors are finding more ways to efficiently and conveniently care for their patients. One such method is through the use of telemedicine—a form of technology-based communication that allows a doctor and patient to communicate without being in the same physical space. Although telemedicine is not a complete replacement for direct patient care, it can be a useful tool for a variety of medical services, such as evaluation, diagnosis and prescribing treatment.

How Telemedicine Works

Through the use of technology, communication is facilitated either in a real-time or delayed setting. Usually a patient is able to communicate from his or her home with a doctor through a live video, audio or patient data transfer system. Doctors can see the patient and assess his or her symptoms, as well as obtain the patient's records and medical history from electronic medical records.

Telemedicine is not a full replacement of the care a patient can receive in a doctor's office; however, it can provide several benefits. Patients can stay in the comfort of their own homes and potentially prevent further illness from exposure to germs in a hospital or clinic. Many medical experts believe that patients who have difficulty traveling or who live in a rural area might have an easier time accessing medical care through telemedicine because telemedicine eliminates the need for travel in many situations. In addition, patients who are recovering from illness or injury at home can be monitored by their doctors through telemedicine visits.

While telemedicine can reduce barriers to receiving medical care, there are some limitations. One main restriction on telemedicine is licensing regulations. In some states, doctors are required to have a license in the state in which they physically practice, as well as in the state in which the patient is located. Additionally, doctors are limited in the kinds of care they are allowed to provide to a new or existing patient. For example, the doctor may not be able to treat a new condition without scheduling a face-to-face follow-up appointment.

How to Prepare for a Telemedicine Appointment

As you prepare for a telemedicine appointment, you should consider several things.

- You will probably need access to a laptop, phone or tablet, as well as an internet connection.
- Because there is physical separation in telemedicine, any information you are able to provide, such as personal medical records and family medical history, can be helpful to your doctor.
- If you are recovering or being cared for at home, it might be helpful to include caregivers in the visit.

For many patients, obtaining medical care can cost a great deal in time, resources and money. Telemedicine is a service that can help reduce the barriers of time and distance to a hospital or doctor's office.

For more information on telemedicine, contact a HR representative.