



## The Rise of Telemedicine in Healthcare: What Does the Future Hold?

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If the natural law of the universe dictates everything is destined to rise and fall, it seems telemedicine hasn't received the memo yet. The industry has been growing rapidly since its inception with no reduction in sight. Experts predict the [global telemedicine market will reach \\$34 billion by the end of 2020](#), and will completely transform U.S. healthcare by 2030.

### Reasons for the Rise

Some of the reasons for this growth are:

- The [increasing number of patients over 65 years](#), who might be living longer but who have a higher number of chronic conditions that require ongoing care
- Demand by patients for improved convenience and efficiency of healthcare delivery
- The urgent need to reduce the number of hospital stays to balance the increased requirement for beds

Since telemedicine enables healthcare practitioners to monitor patients in their own homes, it's a powerful tool for both parties.

### What the Future Holds

As more hospitals begin offering telemedicine services, the number of patients who access them was expected to increase from 350,000 in 2013 to [7 million in 2018](#). The challenge lies in creating programs that promote patient engagement while fitting comfortably into the provider's workflow – and defining standards that support sustainability and scalability.

### Virtual Waiting Rooms and Video Conferencing

What we can be sure of, however, is that the application of telemedicine will be invaluable in areas such as initial consults, many of which will be conducted via video conferencing on either a mobile or desktop device. Doctors will be able to call up medical records with the click of a mouse, while shifting effortlessly between virtual and physical waiting rooms.

### Prescription Renewals

Issues such as the virtual [prescription of controlled substances](#) will give physicians better management of the situation, as they can prescribe one batch of medication at a time and only after having a conversation with the patient.

This eliminates both the risks attached to refill scripts, as well as the need for patients to visit the doctor each time. Secure transmission of the script to the pharmacy will reduce the risks of unauthorized usage.

### Prevention Programs

Preventable conditions such as diabetes will be among the main beneficiaries. Services like Medicare spend billions each year on patients with diabetes, so improved prevention of the condition is vital to reduce the expense to taxpayers.

Structured intervention programs [currently require a classroom setting](#) and follow-up visits with a healthcare practitioner. All of these can be switched to digital platforms, which will result in:

- increased number of patients who can be served
- decreased time and travel requirements for providers and patients
- improved patient monitoring and adherence to the program
- reduced prevalence of the condition, improving overall population health

### Cost Savings

It's not only Medicare that will save money through increased usage of telemedicine. Both patients and providers will save the costs of time and travel. Consultations will be less expensive, [reducing healthcare costs](#) and stretching insurance coverage further for most patients. [Insurance companies are now offering coverage](#) for telemedicine to encourage its usage among members. Less time spent on an appointment will enable providers to help more patients, increasing their revenue.

### Wearable Tech

At this point, many wearables are purely for entertainment, but patients are increasingly using fitness trackers and other sensor devices to record sleep cycles, heart rate, etc. In the future, telemedicine may come to depend partly on the data generated by such wearables, which can track a pulse as well if not better than a physical visit to the doctor. The data can be sent to providers securely online, enabling them to conduct as good an examination of patients.

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