**TeleMedicine – The NextGen Benefit of Minor Healthcare**

It’s not surprising that 2017 stands to be the year many will have an experience to share using a Telemedicine or a Virtual Doctor service. With current market trends, government regulations, and changing economic demands, it’s fast becoming a more popular alternative to traditional healthcare visits. [And, as healthcare costs continue to rise and there are more strategic pricing options and digital models available to users,](http://managedhealthcareexecutive.modernmedicine.com/managed-healthcare-executive/news/three-reasons-telemedicine-will-grow-2017) the appeal for consumers, self-insured employers, health systems and health plans to jump on board is significant.

In a [recent study conducted by the Aloft Group on the state of Telemedicine,](http://www.prweb.com/releases/2016/11/prweb13818679.htm) 47.7% of respondents weren’t sure about what Telemedicine meant, but it’s possible they may have experienced it, as 52.4% have had interaction with a physician or clinician via email or text. Further, 78.5% of respondents indicated they would be comfortable talking with a physician using an online method.

Dr. Tony Yuan, an experienced ER doctor in San Diego, who also consults for Doctor on Demand, provides insight into this increasing trend during a recent Q and A session. [Currently, over half of the patients he sees in his ER](http://www.doctorondemand.com/blog/er-doctors-view) could utilize a digital healthcare model. In fact, 90% of patients who head to the ER for minor illnesses can be treated through this service. So, the next sinus, ear infection, or other minor health issue just may provide you and your family the chance to try what will become the new standard in minor healthcare.

Here are few benefits TeleMedicine has to offer:

**It’s Fast and Simple**

There’s no question apps are available for everything to make our lives easier—and TeleMed is no exception. Within minutes, standard first time users can set up an account, complete a few medical profile questions, then create and save a session. Having the ability to log on with a board-certified physician or clinician 24/7/365, using any PC, smart device, and even phone in some cases, saves time and money. Many services, like [Teledoc](https://www.teladoc.com/) and [MDLive](https://welcome.mdlive.com/), will connect you with a licensed doctor or clinician online in just a few minutes – no scheduling or wait required. Once on, you can discuss your healthcare needs confidentially. After the visit, the doctor will update his/her records, notify your primary care physician of the call, and send an electronic prescription to the pharmacy of your choice, if necessary—all in the time it takes for a lunch break.

**It’s Flexible**

The ability to connect with a professional whether you are at home, work, or traveling makes getting the care you need invaluable. How often have you experienced the symptoms—or the full blown-effect—of getting sick while traveling? Many, no doubt, have had to adjust flight/travel plans to get the help needed from their PCP, in order to avoid getting worse. By using an app or online service from your smart phone or laptop, you’re able to get the antibiotics you need quicker without cutting trips short or missing work to do so.

In addition, patients in smaller communities without the resources available of classically- trained, emergency-med physicians, see the benefit and flexibility of tapping into these online doctor services. Not only is it a plus for the patient to access more advanced care if needed, doctors in these rural areas value this as well. These digital healthcare models provide immediate, life-saving tools for both doctors and their patients who may not have access to higher, acute facilities.

**It’s Affordable**

Many TeleMedicine services now accept insurance, making a patient’s visit free, or at minimum the same as most deductible or co-insurance amounts for office visits; around $40. For those on a high-deductible plan, paying $40 for an online doctor service is a much cheaper alternative than paying $150 or more for an Urgent Care visit, or over $1200 for a trip to the ER. For employers, group options are low cost and can be a clear asset when creating solutions EEs will value.

**It’s Beneficial to Employers**

[Today, 3 of 5 corporations, or 59% of employers](http://ww2.cfo.com/health-benefits/2016/11/employers-warm-telemedicine-benefits/) provide digital healthcare benefits to their employees. As an employer, the benefits are straightforward. First, employees can participate in professional consultations for their family members or themselves without taking away from productivity. Second, when employers incorporate these services into their benefit plans, non-emergency care is redirected from expensive ER visits, ultimately saving thousands of dollars or more to the bottom line. Additionally, TeleHealth services offer frequent monitoring from clinicians for those employees who may need regular support due to more chronic issues, reducing trips to the hospital. Reducing these costs have a direct ROI for the employer and relieves the stress on the employee’s pocketbook. Third, many companies are now adding this digital benefit to their packages as a way to recruit new talent.

There’s no doubt 2017 will see a greater opportunity for all to experience the increasing trend of Telemed. [Creating a clear communication strategy](https://www.benefitnews.com/opinion/4-ways-to-boost-telehealth-utilization?feed=00000152-18a4-d58e-ad5a-99fc032b0000) to make sure employees know how to find, access and utilize this service to the highest potential is key. Vendors who partner with a benefits technology firm that provide these services will have a wealth of web and print material, and in many cases [explainer videos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT795RZPYD0), like one we’ve provided to our benefit agency clients. Let us help you create a winning strategy to implement this valuable digital benefit. [Contact us](http://benefitseasy.com/contact-us/) for more information.