Implementing Telemedicine Services
during the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond

Providing Nephrology Services Via Telelmedicine

Medical practices of all sizes and types are turning to telemedicine as a way to reach patients who cannot leave home, generate more revenue, keep costs down and maintain customer loyalty.

Experience often shows that under the right circumstances, telemedicine can be as effective as in-person delivery of services. Practices like yours are working as quickly as possible to implement this form of remote patient care as a response to the Public Health Emergency and dangers of COVID-19, however it may be something to consider sustaining after we return to normal operations. Telemedicine is a valuable tool for managing chronic care patients to slow the progression of kidney disease, working to avoid dialysis and/or transplantations. Nephrologists also use telemedicine to develop at-home care plans for patients recovering from kidney replacement surgery. There are a few things you can do to help make your telemedicine program successful while avoiding some common mistakes. **Here are some best practices:**

Have Clear Goals

It is very helpful to sit down and think about the goals for your telemedicine program right at the outset. Clear goals will keep your service focused on providing the desired benefits to your patients and practice, not just reacting to the emergency situation the COVID-19 pandemic has presented. You might consider how you want your telemedicine program to impact things like revenue, customer satisfaction, wait times, no-shows and cancellations, staff efficiency, patient retention, new patients, and any other measurements that are important for your practice.

Involve your Staff

Telemedicine will have an impact on several functions within the practice, so it is a good idea to get a number of people involved in the roll-out of your program. Consider assembling a task-force that includes providers who will be using telemedicine, people who will be scheduling appointments, any available technical resources, and people from other business functions that might be able to assist. If people are engaged early and have the opportunity to help shape the program, they will feel more invested in its success.

Learn About Reimbursement Rules and Regulations in Your State

Medicare has temporarily relaxed restrictions for the provision of telemedicine services as a result of the Public Health Emergency. After the pandemic has passed, look into ways telemedicine may still be a viable option for your practice. State laws and payer policies about telemedicine reimbursement vary widely. Most are becoming more progressive and embracing telehealth as an important tool for meeting the healthcare needs of the public. To that end, about half of the states have what are known as "parity" laws, requiring reimbursement for remote video visits. However, there is not a consistent approach and you will benefit from looking into regulations in your state.

Find the Right Technology Partner

There are a variety of telemedicine technologies available. Any solution you consider should be:
- Easy for patients and staff to use
- Secure and HIPAA compliant
- Equipped with a method of verifying patient eligibility for reimbursement
- Integrated with your EHR solution

Decide How Telemedicine Will Be Utilized in Your Practice

There is no universal telemedicine utilization strategy. You can tailor an approach that meets the unique needs of your practice. It may make sense to block off certain times during the week for remote visits, or you may decide to make video visits available during times that the office is traditionally closed. One approach to increasing utilization and revenue is conducting the follow up phone calls that you already do by video. Telephone calls are typically not reimbursable, whereas video encounters may very well be.

Market the Service

It is important to make sure that your patients know that telemedicine visits are an option for them. You may want to post signs in the office, send an email, or make mentioning it a part of every in-person encounter. Even if patients don't immediately embrace the approach, knowing that it is an option may help keep them loyal to the practice.

Ask for Feedback

Whenever you introduce something new to your staff and patients, it is important to gather their feedback. Think about the best way for you to get the insight of both groups and integrate their best ideas into your program.

Measure Success against Your Goals

Once you are seeing patients via telemedicine, remember to check in with your goals from time to time. You may need to tweak your program or your goals after you get started. It is also important to recognize and reward your team when goals are met or exceeded.

Telemedicine has the potential to change your practice for the better in a number of ways, so it is smart to introduce it thoughtfully. These best practices will help you along the path to a healthy telemedicine program.