

6 steps to creating patient trust in telehealth

By [Neil Kinsley](#)

28 Aug 2020

With Covid-19, came a flood of new telehealth (virtual consulting) healthcare solutions, exposing more patients to its benefits and features. More advertising, more awareness and more conversations have introduced telehealth to a broader public, and this can only be good for everyone. The question remains though, how do we create that trust in telehealth for a patient, so that they turn to it the next time they need healthcare?



[123rf.com](#)

Possible contenders for understanding the dynamics could include, different patient demographics, or the fact that the solution on offer is easier to navigate in one practice than another. The following are recommendations and tips, for healthcare providers in general, who are looking to incorporate formalised telehealth into their practices.

1. Be the one to introduce the benefits of telehealth and start the conversation

I was in conversation with a provider, and asked: How did you get telehealth so right, so quickly? He said, I tell my patients that they are crazy if they don't use it. He speaks to them about it in his rooms and he makes it part of his consultation. He focuses on the benefits of telehealth to the patient, such as the convenience factor, the fact that they save time and money by not having to drive to his rooms. He makes mention of the fact that he can generally extend care on the very same day, while charging them less, and often gives a free consult for making use of his solution. He also remarks that his patients, whilst generally aware of telehealth as a solution, only begin to trust the service once he has introduced the subject.

2. Market your service

The problem with telehealth is getting patients to know that healthcare providers actually offer it. It potentially takes a fair amount of time and I often see a provider give up after a month or so, saying their patients weren't interested. Most of the time, they didn't even know they could use it.

However, those same patients continue to use WhatsApp and email - forms of telehealth albeit not necessarily secure.

It is not uncommon for practices to have a one pager that they have designed with the benefits to their patients, how to use it, and it's a great place to include consulting rates. Patients like to have something tangible. Placing information onto Facebook, LinkedIn and communal circulars is also common practice. One highly effective idea I have seen in practice is a fridge magnet that contained the vital information about the telehealth solution. The patient could attach it to their fridge door, not only was it practical, it also served as a constant reminder that the healthcare provider offered such a service in the first place.

3. Plain talk

This was a great provider tip.... stay away from the telehealth jargon, like "virtual care". Rather stick with better known phrases such as "online appointment". The idea is new enough as it is, throwing in tech speak can be confusing and off putting. Make it an easy conversation with the patient, so as not to leave them confused and wary of what are for many, new-fangled ideas and technology.

4. Facilitate questions

Including mention of telehealth in the conversation is one thing, but then you need to encourage your patients to ask questions, so you and your staff need to have the answers at the ready. Providers also put material in their rooms, inviting their patients to approach their staff about telehealth. When patients have the opportunity to ask about telehealth, especially from their trusted provider, they are going to feel a lot more comfortable about it. Make sure that the telehealth solution you choose, can offer some kind of information sharing or training for staff members.

5. Practical demonstration - show and tell

I love the idea of demonstrating your solution with your staff (and even patients). It shows that the practice is involved. You can do a dummy consultation with one of your front desk assistants and show how easy and efficient a consultation can be. You're able to show them that it works. No better person to demonstrate than you and the more your practice the more confident you will become too.

6. Tools of the telehealth trade

I've seen a telehealth initiative fail because patients were under the impression that they needed a desktop computer, or the top of the range smart phone to access the solution. Reassure your patient that they probably have all the tools they need and that it will more than likely not require any outlay from them. Make sure your patients know what they need and that it probably requires no further outlay from their side. Chances are, they already have everything they need. There is often a perception that this is complex and requires extra equipment. Demonstrating how easy it is will set the record straight.

In answering the question around why one practice has a flourishing telehealth initiative, and another doesn't, provider intervention and participation plays a big part in the success. Installing a new solution, sitting back and waiting to see what happens, is bound to fail. Like any good idea, you need to tell people about it. The secret is to put yourself in the patients shoes. When you analyse a new solution, think about it from their point of view. Once you have instilled patient trust in your telehealth solution, you'll wonder what you ever did without it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Neil Kinsley is the CEO of Medici Africa.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>