

Benefits Insights

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Telerehabilitation

As technology has developed, the practice of telemedicine (also known as virtual visits, telehealth and e-health) has become an increasingly popular way for patients to get the care they need without having to visit a traditional health care facility.

Since its introduction to the industry, telemedicine has grown rapidly and evolved into different types of telehealth services. One of the most popular services offered via telemedicine is telerehabilitation (virtual rehabilitation services).

Telerehabilitation was introduced as a solution to make it easier for patients to receive and stick to their prescribed rehabilitation programs, and as a way to provide physical therapy services for patients who have significant injuries or recoveries that make traveling difficult or dangerous. This telehealth service opens the door for convenient, accessible and, in some cases, more affordable rehabilitative care.

What is telerehabilitation?

In short, telerehabilitation refers to virtual physical therapy services. In the vast majority of cases, telerehabilitation involves two types of services:

- **Assessment**—Similar to an initial in-office physical therapy consultation, a telerehabilitation provider will go over a patient's needs. This may involve asking questions about an ailment or injury, and could include reviewing medical information. In some cases, the telerehabilitation clinical assessment may also involve a virtual inspection of a patient's home to ensure that they will be able to receive virtual physical therapy services.
- **Therapy**—After conducting an assessment, a provider can plan and hold virtual physical therapy sessions for patients. The types of telerehabilitation offered will vary by plan design and type, but some of the most common include:
 - **Video format**—This is one of the most popular telerehabilitation methods. With this method, a provider and patient interact in real-time over video. This can be done on a computer, smartphone or other electronic device.
 - **Remote patient monitoring**—With this type of telerehabilitation method, a provider enters treatment information, such as physical therapy exercises for the patient to complete, into an electronic platform. From there, the patient can access the treatment instructions and complete the rehabilitation on their own time. Some of these formats show when a patient signs in and out of the system, and some also require patients to click through a module so the provider can track progress of the prescribed treatment.
 - **Avatar-and-sensor technology**—Some plans may offer technology-forward telerehabilitation methods like avatar-based modules. With this method, a patient goes through their recommended rehabilitation program with a 3D motion-capture avatar that senses their movement. This platform also logs when a patient signs on, whether they completed their rehabilitation session and when they sign off, making it easy to monitor progress.



Benefits of Telerehabilitation

Fueled by technological advances and answering the demand for convenient care, telerehabilitation delivers many advantages. As it is a type of telemedicine, it's not surprising that telerehabilitation shares the same core benefits.

- **Increased access and availability**—Virtual physical therapy services increase the access and availability of rehabilitation to patients that live in rural areas, patients that can't make it to a physical therapy clinic during business hours and patients that shouldn't travel due to their condition.
- **Reduced costs**—One of the main advantages of telerehabilitation is the cost reduction it can provide. With virtual rehabilitation, patients typically save money on transportation costs and specialist visit copays. Moreover, the increased access to care that telerehabilitation provides makes it easier for patients to keep up with their rehabilitation, which can help speed up their recovery and keep additional health care costs at bay.

On the provider side, telerehabilitation helps keep costs down by increasing the number of patients that can be seen daily and increasing patient progress monitoring efficiencies.

- **Increased convenience**—When it comes to following the doctor's orders, patients don't always stick to their recommended treatment, especially if part of that treatment isn't convenient. Failing to follow medical advice often leads to exacerbated health conditions, which leads to increased medical costs. With telerehabilitation, patients can receive their recommended treatment from the comfort and convenience of their own home.

Disadvantages of Telerehabilitation

The disadvantages of telerehabilitation mirror those of telemedicine. The two most prominent disadvantages include:

- **Lack of in-person care**—One of the most common pitfalls of telehealth services is that they don't always provide an opportunity for patients to develop a relationship with their health care provider. With telerehabilitation, this may not be as much of a concern, as patients will be working with a

provider or group of providers throughout their rehabilitation, but it is still something to consider. Moreover, certain medical cases may be better suited to be addressed in person rather than electronically.

- **Equipment requirements**—Without the proper equipment, patients and providers may experience difficulties when receiving telerehabilitation services. In addition to having a compatible electronic device, camera and microphone, a patient may also need to evaluate their internet connection in order for the televisit to be effective.

Summary

Telerehabilitation is helping providers give patients access to affordable and convenient rehabilitation services. Although it isn't the right treatment option for every patient or every condition, it does offer a handful of benefits. For more information about telerehabilitation or telemedicine, contact Insure NW.