# KEYS TO IMPLEMENTING TELEMEDICINE IN YOUR PRACTICE

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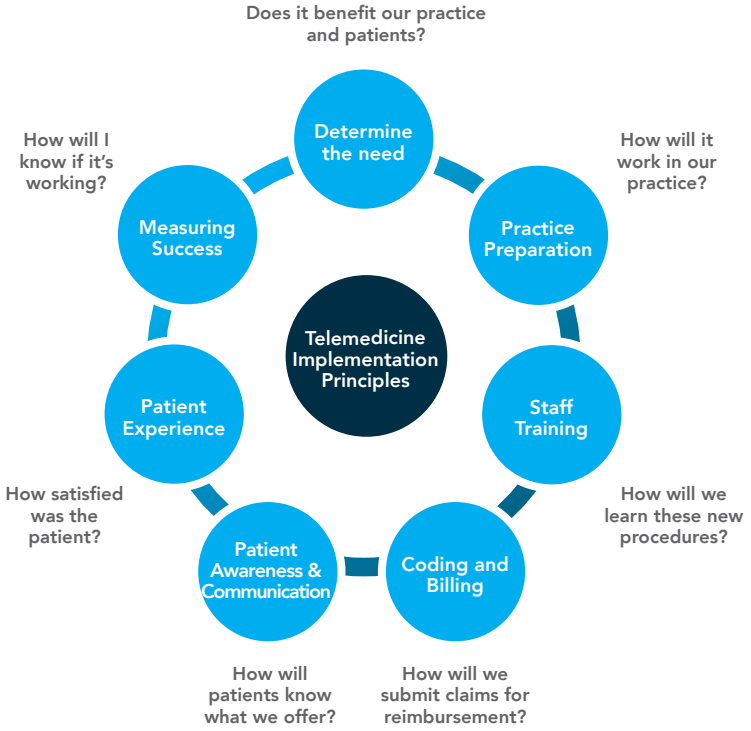
# Making an Informed Decision

In these uncertain times, establishing new processes and procedures within your practice is needed to comply with recommended safety precautions during and post-COVID-19. As new ways of staying connected and seeing patients are evolving, the awareness and availability of telemedicine has rapidly increased. Doctors of Optometry are now researching, evaluating, and implementing telemedicine into their practice to continue seeing patients in this new environment. Whether deciding to adopt telemedicine, currently in the implementation process, or already seeing patients using telemedicine, VSP® has developed the following guidelines based on learnings and best practices working with ODs like you. Here are the seven key principles to help support your decision and differentiate your practice.



# Determine the Need

## Review the Impacts on Your Practice and Patients

Identifying the advantages and disadvantages of adopting telemedicine into your practice is the first step required to make an informed decision. Review these key points to ensure you're able to meet the needs of your practice while continuing to ensure patient satisfaction.

### Patients

#### Advantages

- Reduces risk of spreading or contracting COVID-19
- Makes seeing care providers easier and more convenient
- Removes transportation barriers (distance, immobility, transportation, time constraints) from accessing care
- Increases access to communication with the care team
- Increases access to specialized care that's typically unavailable in rural or underserved areas

#### Concerns

- Impersonal communication
- Unfamiliarity with technology
- Hesitancy with learning new procedures
- Will need additional assistance to understand how to use
- Quality of care might decrease
- Privacy and confidentiality

### ODs

#### Advantages

- Reduces risk of spreading or contracting COVID-19
- Better adherence to recommended safety precautions
- Maximizes patient scheduling efficiency
- Serves as a potential new revenue stream to see more patients without the added cost of an additional location
- Balances staff resources and OD availability
- Practice to the full scope of your licensure
- Better serves patients who would otherwise have limited access to care
- Coordinates care with Primary Care Physicians (PCP) in rural or underserved areas
- Increases patient engagement

#### Concerns

- Hesitancy with learning new office procedures
- Capital expense to implement new platform/integrate into existing EHR
- Unfamiliarity of new billing and coding requirements and reporting
- Oversight required to ensure new processes and procedures are being followed
- Patient perception and experience to ensure confidentiality and security
- Maintaining quality of care
- Liability risks and meeting technology requirements

# Practice Preparation

## Review Your Current Workflow

Update your current processes and procedures to maintain practice effectiveness and efficiency, and identify the changes needed to your workflow to incorporate telemedicine services:

- Determine how telemedicine appointments will be scheduled (by phone, online scheduling, and/or text)
- Determine when telemedicine appointments will be scheduled (consider the types of services, business hours, etc.)
- Establish a process to obtain and document patient consent for telemedicine services
- Ensure the correct appointment types are set up in your practice management and electronic health record (EHR) software and other systems to verify appropriate coding, billing, and tracking of telemedicine visits
- Establish how to gather intake forms and complete registration for appointments (refer patients to your patient portal, identify staff to send electronic forms, etc.)
- Consider updating your payment collection processes to paperless billing (utilize virtual billing process to reduce costs, improve accuracy, and support different visit workflows)
- Create surveys to follow up on the appointment and to assess patient satisfaction
- Test your processes internally from the perspective of your patient (ensure efficiency does not affect quality, privacy, or experience)
- Check with your professional liability insurance to ensure it specifically includes telemedicine services

LINKS

Additional Resources:

Review of Optometric Business Special Report

# Practice Preparation (Cont'd)

## Select Your Telemedicine Tools

Many factors go into choosing the right tools for your practice. Be sure to include your staff and reach out to colleagues to obtain recommendations and feedback:

- Calculate total cost to avoid hidden fees and take advantage of promotions (identify set-up fees, subscription fees, special offers, etc.)
- Ensure the platform meets regulatory compliance requirements to collect and transmit patient data electronically using HIPAA/HITECH-secure channels to protect patient confidentiality, privacy and security
- Confirm the platform has sufficient features for your needs, both short-term and long-term
- Review how easy is it to learn and implement for your staff
- Confirm platform integration with your current (EHR) software and other systems
- Understand the vendor's support offerings (helpline, tutorials, demos, setup, and warranty)
- Consider patient needs, expectations, and perceptions
- Gain confidence by testing the selected platform with your staff, family, and peers to gradually learn key features

LINKS

Additional Resources:

Telemedicine During Reopening Podcast
Practice Reopening Guide
Practice Reopening Roadmap

# Staff Training

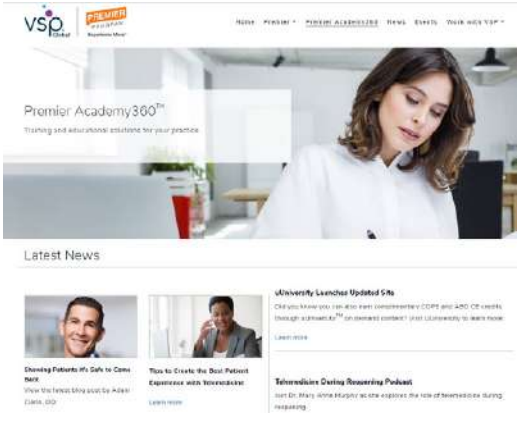
Engage staff to ensure everything has been covered while identifying workflows and selecting your telehealth tools. Getting staff buy-in is critical to success, as everyone will feel their needs have been considered:

- Identify whether training needs to be performed per position/area (billing staff, opticians, office managers, etc.) or team-wide
- Host a kickoff meeting to outline and define staff roles and establish regular meetings to set key checkpoints and to gather feedback
- Determine any additional training and materials needed for your team, such as:
  - ✓ Telemedicine requirements, guidelines, and FAQs
  - ✓ Coding and billing webinars
  - ✓ PPE supplies, safety, and precautions
  - ✓ Scheduling policies (obtaining consent, emergency contact, privacy, etc.)
- Test your workflow and technology with your staff before your first visit
- Have a contingency/backup plan in place for your workflows
- Establish a set of criteria for staff to follow when scheduling the appropriate type of "visit"
- Establish a common language to help your team know key words and how to discuss telemedicine with patients

Additional Resources:

Premier Academy360™

LINKS



# Coding and Billing

Knowing how to bill your telemedicine services will greatly determine your ease of adoption and success. With the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) temporarily removing previous restrictions during these challenging times, the rules have changed for the use of telemedicine. To ensure accurate reimbursement, coding proficiency of the different types of telemedicine visits is required:

- **Telemedicine visits:** Real-time, synchronous audio and video telecommunications technology used to facilitate the delivery of a visit
- **Telephone visits:** Encounter between patient and provider—traditionally via voice-only phone
- **Virtual check-ins:** Brief (5–10 minutes) check-in with patients via telephone or other device to decide whether an office visit or other service is needed, and to review patient recorded video and/or images submitted
- **Remote monitoring:** Remote monitoring of physiologic parameter(s) through medical devices

Always refer to current CMS guidelines and information for the latest information on coding and billing.

Additional Resources:

LINKS

CPT Code Guide for patients with VSP, Medicare, and non-VSP vision coverage

CPT Code Guide for patients with the VSP Primary Eyecare Plan℠ providing supplemental medical coverage

# Patient Awareness

Think of your online presence as your virtual waiting room and an extension of the patient experience. With your updated workflows, staff training, and coding and billing knowledge complete, you'll be ready to communicate with your current patients and attract new patients with telemedicine services:

- Leverage your practice communication channels (email, social media, newsletters, etc.) to promote your services and send announcements
- Showcase your telemedicine services on Yelp with their new feature highlighting virtual service offerings
- Update your website to inform patients that you are available for video appointments and guide them to the appropriate channel to schedule their appointment
- Update your out-of-office phone recordings and hold messaging to reflect the availability of telemedicine exams
- Update your practice profile on VSPOnline to display a telemedicine service indicator on the *Find a Doctor Directory* on **vsp.com**
- Access the My Marketing Team COVID-19 toolkit to obtain additional marketing materials:
  - ✓ Social media posts
  - ✓ Email templates
  - ✓ Digital signage
  - ✓ Custom-printed marketing materials
  - ✓ Informative patient engagement articles

Additional resources:

Download Social Media Graphics

LINKS

# Patient Experience

## Increase Patient Confidence

With clear communication using your established telemedicine procedures, your practice can provide patients with the assurance that their virtual visit will be easy to conduct and minimize any reservations:

- Identify patient preferences when scheduling the appointment (provide them with information on the differences and needs for video visits)
- Obtain and document patient consent for telemedicine services
- Provide clear information to patients about their appointment (links, instructions, how to get help if there is a problem, etc.)
- Create an online lifestyle questionnaire or quiz to match your practice solutions to patient needs
- Create a pre-appointment checklist to ensure patients know what to expect and are prepared:
  - ✓ Patient knowledge and usage of app (if applicable)
  - ✓ Equipment to be used (smartphone, laptop, etc.)
  - ✓ Internet connectivity
  - ✓ Correct phone number you'll be calling and the number you will be dialing from (for phone appointments)
  - ✓ Patient setting to be a private and quiet space
  - ✓ Accessibility needs (language barriers, hearing issues, etc.)

# Patient Experience (Cont'd)

## Gather Feedback

Create surveys for patients to capture how they are responding to and engaging with telemedicine before and after their virtual visit, enabling you to compare against satisfaction scores of patients who did not use telemedicine. If observing lower scores for patients using telemedicine, refer back to your workflow and process, and evaluate the areas which may be contributing to decreased satisfaction. Here are examples of satisfaction measurements to include in your surveys.

- Satisfaction of telemedicine office procedures and communication
- Satisfaction of telemedicine exam with OD
- Likelihood of scheduling another telemedicine exam
- Ease of joining the telemedicine exam
- Wait time to get an appointment

LINKS

Additional Resources:

Patient Experience Guide

Solutionreach Survey Creation Guide

# Measuring Success

Document all of your success metrics before the implementation of your telemedicine program. This will help show how your telemedicine services have specifically contributed to your larger goals, rather than only being able to note an increased number of appointments. Compare metrics before and after telemedicine implementation, and between telemedicine and non-telemedicine integrated visits to analyze results.

- Set up processes and systems to track important metrics:
  - ✓ Patients seen per day
  - ✓ Patient visit duration
  - ✓ Patient waiting times
  - ✓ Patient flow (new patients)
  - ✓ Payment/reimbursement amounts
  - ✓ Capture rates
- Conduct meetings with staff to discuss and identify how they are responding to telemedicine processes and procedures
- Calculate return on investment (ROI), and consider staff and patient sentiment to create your future telemedicine strategy
- Create staff surveys to monitor telemedicine-focused performance within your practice:
  - ✓ Satisfaction of telemedicine office procedures and adherence
  - ✓ Satisfaction of telemedicine training and knowledge
  - ✓ Feedback and suggestions for identified challenges and/or inefficiencies
  - ✓ Action items to be implemented for continual improvement

We hope this guide has provided new insights regarding the impact telemedicine will have on your practice and patients, ensuring a balance of effectiveness and satisfaction for everyone involved. VSP is committed to providing you with continued tools and resources to help support your practice.

Do you have specific questions in any implementation areas or interested in learning more about telemedicine? Visit our telemedicine page and contact your VSP representative or email Premier@vsp.com.

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