



Asynchronous Telehealth: Improving Access, Empowering Patients, and Reducing Costs

Telehealth is a proven and safe way of delivering healthcare services using both synchronous (in real time, instantaneous communications like phone or video) or asynchronous (non-instantaneous patient communication through secure methods) technologies. Listening to what patients need and meeting gaps in care, healthcare providers are using innovative asynchronous telehealth technologies to help improve the way patients can access and communicate with their providers.

What is Asynchronous Telehealth?

Asynchronous telehealth interactions allow patients and providers to communicate and exchange important health information when it's most convenient for them, whereas synchronous telehealth interactions require patients and providers to communicate in "real time." Healthcare providers and health systems are increasingly using asynchronous technologies to receive and transmit a patient's health data, vital signs, and other diagnostic and physiologic data to deliver consultations, diagnoses, and treatment plans in an affordable, convenient and efficient manner.

The ability of providers and patients to communicate on their own busy schedules has become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Asynchronous telehealth:

- **Is relied on by trusted healthcare providers:** Telehealth providers across the country – from leading organizations such as Intermountain Healthcare to the Veterans Administration – use asynchronous technologies to perform patient evaluations and provide clinical care for both new and established patients.
- **Is appropriate and safe for multiple use-cases:** Research shows that asynchronous technologies can be appropriately and safely used to deliver care in various fields including primary care, dermatology, radiology, psychology, women's health, and men's health.
- **Offers a wide range of capabilities:** Asynchronous telehealth technologies include adaptable medical interviews based on evidenced-based care, app-based services, and secure patient portals.

What are the Advantages of Asynchronous Telehealth?

Patients and providers report improved access to care and a high level of satisfaction using asynchronous technologies for many reasons:

- **Meets patients where they are:** While synchronous telehealth technologies (like video) require both patients and providers to be available at the same time, asynchronous technologies allow patients to initiate care 24 hours a day and ensure the issue is addressed as fast and cost-effectively as possible.
- **Addresses digital barriers to access:** Synchronous technologies can be a barrier to care for those who lack access to fast or reliable broadband internet, a problem which is exacerbated in rural and urban communities. Asynchronous technologies enable patients to easily communicate with a provider using low bandwidth connections.
- **Overcomes shame and stigma:** Stigmas associated with certain conditions, like behavioral and sexual health issues, can cause patients to avoid in-person or synchronous care. Asynchronous technologies can provide an opportunity for patients to have an honest and discreet exchange of medical information with providers without anxiety.
- **Relieves provider burnout and burdens:** Providers can spend up to 40% of their time on administrative tasks like data entry into EHRs (called "desktop medicine"). By collecting patient data in structured formats and

streamlining provider workflows, asynchronous technologies allow providers to devote their time to what they do best: treat patients.

How has COVID-19 Further Demonstrated the Value of Asynchronous Telehealth?

While asynchronous services have been used safely for years, these technologies have had a dramatic impact in 2020 to alleviate the strain on in-person and traditional synchronous telehealth services by:

- Appropriately triaging patients with COVID-19 symptoms;
- Maintaining continuity of care for patients with non-COVID-19 health issues;
- Helped an already strained healthcare infrastructure provide uninterrupted care during an unprecedented public health emergency and allow providers to see more patients.

How Can Policymakers Support Asynchronous Telehealth to Expand Access?

State policymakers should establish regulatory frameworks that give providers the discretion to use all available and appropriate telehealth technologies -- both synchronous and asynchronous-- so long as the standard of care is met. As policymakers consider how best to modernize and reform telehealth policy, the ATA encourages state leaders to consider the following principles:

- **Technology-neutral laws:** As patients and consumers seek more convenient, affordable ways to access care, regulatory frameworks should not include mandates that providers always use certain technologies or modalities.
- **Empower patients and providers:** Permit healthcare professionals to use their clinical judgment to determine the appropriate telehealth technologies – whether asynchronous or synchronous –to deliver care for new and established patients based on the particular patient and the clinical issue presented.
- **Encourage innovation:** Telehealth regulation should be flexible enough to account for future developments and avoid having to constantly revisit rules to permit new clinical technologies.
- **Focus on the standard of care:** The backbone of clinically appropriate telehealth policy is the standard of care. All telehealth services, whether synchronous or asynchronous, must allow the healthcare practitioner to meet that standard.

Your Resource – the ATA

As you consider policies regarding asynchronous telehealth technology, please consider the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) as a resource. As the only organization completely focused on advancing telehealth, the ATA is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to safe, affordable, and appropriate care when and where they need it, enabling the system to do more good for more people. For more information, please visit americantelemed.org.