Illinois Impact
How Telehealth Flexibilities Benefit Patients

University of Chicago Medicine (UCM), Chicago

At UCM, the Department of Psychiatry team was able to maintain care at full capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the South Side of Chicago, where many of UCM's patients are older and/or have multiple chronic conditions, telehealth has enabled clinicians to monitor patients' health by remotely measuring blood sugar levels, heart rhythm and oxygen levels in the blood, and quickly make adjustments in treatment that improve outcomes. UCM provided very few services via telehealth prior to the pandemic, however between March and July, it provided nearly 30 thousand telephone visits and 60 thousand audio-video visits.

La Rabida Children's Hospital, Chicago

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, La Rabida successfully transitioned over 70% of outpatient appointments to telehealth. Using real-time audio-visual technology, patients – many with medically complex conditions – have access to everything from primary and specialty care appointments, behavioral health services, and even wheelchair deliveries. The delivery of a new wheelchair is an appointment that typically takes place within the walls of the hospital. However, in April 2020, with the recent implementation of telemedicine capabilities, physical and occupational therapists located at the hospital were able to use video conferencing to collaborate with an on-site wheelchair technician at a patient's home to make adjustments to the device and work one-on-one with his family on how to position him in the chair, operate the device and perform proper maintenance.

Hospital Sisters Health System (HSHS), Springfield

During the first months of the pandemic, HSHS accelerated use of telehealth, including acquiring technology, making it easier for patients to utilize virtual care services, and expanding use of telehealth for both inpatient and outpatient services. Examples include:

- Creating a new wellness program to assist individuals isolated at home. The program provided telehealth appointments to help patients improve quality of life through light physical exercises and positioning and breathing exercises to help improve physical function, activity level and fatigue.

- Waiving fees for use of its Anytime Care virtual visits related to screening and evaluation of COVID-19. (HSHS Anytime Care provides 24-hour access to primary care for home using everyday technology and without an appointment.) In May 2020, the program provided 1,080 virtual visits, compared with 385 in May 2019.

> **"Whether facilitating access to a teleneurologist for someone experiencing a stroke, a neonatologist for a newborn consultation, or an intensivist for a patient with critical health issues, having this direct access to specialists helps expedite treatment decisions, reduces disability, avoids unnecessary transfers and ultimately saves lives."**
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> — *Dr. Gurpreet Mander, HSHS Illinois*

Northwestern Medicine (NM), Chicago

NM expanded access to telehealth services during the pandemic, allowing patients who previously had to spend long hours in traffic and pay for costly Chicago city parking to visit their clinician from the comfort of their home. This development has especially helpful to bed-bound patients who require Medivan in order to travel. Northwestern found the flexibilities on types of communication used by patients and practitioners has expanded access for patients who struggle with certain types of technology and/or lack access to necessary video technology due to financial constraints.

OSF Healthcare, Peoria

OSF HealthCare provided more than 50,000 COVID related telehealth encounters during the first 31 days of the pandemic. These encounters included basic triage, patient monitoring, and utilization of its behavioral health app.[1] These telehealth encounters played a key role in preserving capacity at area hospitals.

Advocate-Aurora, OSF, and Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Medicine Partnership with State of Illinois

In response to COVID-19, Advocate-Aurora Healthcare, OSF HealthCare and SIU School of Medicine are partnering with the State of Illinois to support patients across the state experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, with a focus on underserved communities and those at high-risk during the pandemic. The state's Remote Patient Monitoring Program connects residents with Pandemic Health Workers (PHWs) virtually visit individuals experiencing symptoms or who tested positive for the virus, and provides wellness kits that include items critical to monitoring symptoms, recovering at home, and preventing virus spread such as thermometers, pulse oximeters, blood pressure cuffs, alcohol wipes and masks. As part of the program, PHWs follow-up with patients over a 14-day period and can even connect patients to services under the umbrella of social determinants of health by connecting individuals to services related to food, housing, and transportation. This program is directly improving access to care and reducing barriers to wellness.

Sinai Health System (SHS), Chicago

In response to COVID-19, SHS rapidly increased access to virtual services, providing patients with medical and behavioral health appointments, speech-language pathology, physical therapy and more. SHS is a safety-net healthcare system serving residents on Chicago's West and Southwest sides, including many who live in communities hardest hit by COVID-19 and have high rates of co-morbidities. In order to scale access to telehealth, SHS built an internal telehealth platform, updated and invested in equipment, standardized workflows, and educated clinicians and staff on how to facilitate a telehealth clinic. Increased flexibilities and reimbursement for telehealth made it possible for SHS to maintain access to care and also continue critical health outreach and community programs, such as its elder abuse program through Sinai Community Institute.

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[1] https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/innovation/how-osfs-6-digital-approaches-handle-more-50000-covid-encounters