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TELEHEALTH: How to make it a seamless extension of your brand

At small clinics and large health systems across the country, telehealth is happening – and it's happening now.

Successful telehealth programs have detailed plans that cover everything from how staff members prep patients to how doctors present on-camera. The result?

Telehealth becomes a seamless extension of your brand. Read on to find out how.

When you think of telehealth, what comes to mind? Smartphone doctor visits? Gadgets for monitoring your health?

At its best, telehealth is on-demand, patient-centered care that is changing the way healthcare is delivered. And this is not “the future of care.” Telehealth is happening right now at small clinics, large teaching hospitals and health systems across the country.

Implementing a successful telehealth program is a challenge. We asked industry pros to give us their insights. Not surprising — the experts told us that planning and communications are key.

Successful telehealth programs have detailed written plans that cover everything from how staff members prep patients to how doctors present on-camera. The result? Telehealth becomes a seamless extension of your brand.

Are you ready to create a communications plan for your telehealth program?

Executive Summary

- Successful telehealth programs are working today in a variety of settings from rural clinics to major teaching hospitals.
- Telehealth does not mean dropping gadgets and cameras into care settings.
- Planning and communications is key to success and should include education, standards, guidelines, PR, and workflow documentation. Integrate your branding.
- Telehealth programs generally use some combination of live video, remote patient monitoring, store and forward, and mobile healthcare.
- Your four constituencies — patients, caregivers, staff, and community — have different needs and concerns around telehealth.

What is telehealth?

A simple way to define telehealth is technology that helps caregivers do what they do best: deliver healthcare to patients. While still evolving, most professional organizations cite four major applications of telehealth.

As a healthcare marketing pro, your action plan should include creating clear, realistic guidelines and stories around each of these applications. Weave those stories into your branding.

- **Live video** generally means two-way communication via audiovisual telecommunications. This can include patient visits, peer-to-peer consults, and diagnostics.
Tell this story: “Access and convenience for patients and caregivers.”
- **Remote patient monitoring** generally includes real-time monitoring of patients from in-hospital to home. Some of the most successful applications include stroke, radiology, mental health, and ICU monitoring.
Tell this story: “Remote monitoring frees caregivers for more hands-on care while increasing safety for patients.”
- **Store and forward** includes patient education videos, healthcare records, and specialists reviewing medical tests such as CAT scans.
Tell this story: “Seamless information system for both patients and caregivers.”
- **Mobile health** is an evolving application which includes everything from delivering health tips and reminders to on-demand, face-to-face video appointments on smartphones.
Tell this story: “Healthcare beyond hospital walls.”



Telehealth is here. Are you ready?

Telehealth is best understood as a journey, not a destination. The keys to a successful journey are planning, setting expectations, and delivering timely information.

As you implement your telehealth program, your communication plan should include education, system process documentation, guidelines, workflow analysis, community marketing, public relations, social media, app development, video, and audio.

Most important? Frame the stories around how telehealth is expanding your system's ability to deliver care. Include telehealth as part of your larger brand story.

With telehealth touching nearly every part of your healthcare system, having a comprehensive communications plan assures that everyone is excited about — and ready for — telehealth.



Telehealth “means we can enhance the patient’s experience and deliver services when they need it, where they need it,” said Peter Kung, System Vice President, Virtual Health for SCL Health. “We can expand the continuum of care right to our patients.”

[Read more of Peter’s view from 30,000 feet.](#)

How can we effectively communicate with patients, caregivers, staff, and our community about telehealth?

A successful communications plan builds a story around how each group sees and uses your brand. Let’s look at the challenges and solutions.

PATIENTS

Surprisingly, this group may be the most enthusiastic adopters of telehealth.

Patients who have limited access to care or demanding work or family schedules welcome the flexibility, convenience, and cost-savings of having healthcare delivered at home or a nearby clinic.

Telehealth can literally be a lifesaver for patients with chronic conditions. They can be monitored as often as needed — and not just when they can get to the doctor’s office.

Challenges: Telehealth can bring fear of the unknown.

- Will I have the same relationship with my doctor? Will I have to see new doctors?
- Is my medical information private and secure?
- How can I set this up? Do I need to buy special equipment?
- What does having a telehealth appointment even mean?

Solutions: Your plan needs to prepare and educate patients.

Prepared patients tend to be highly satisfied with their telehealth experience. Read the blog post [My First Telehealth Appointment](#) about the experience I had while traveling.

Make sure you set realistic goals and expectations. Caregivers and support staff should understand patient concerns and help them feel comfortable.

Keep the set-up and technology as simple as possible. Have clear directions and help available so patients have success.

Tell success stories: easier, more frequent telehealth visits to treat chronic conditions; access to care from anywhere; the ability to consult with specialists without the expense or burden of travel. (See *Sidebar: Tell Patient Stories With Care on page 8*)

Ease patient’s concerns around privacy. Remind them that telehealth is simply another choice they have for their care.





“How will this work? Will I need to learn 20 new things to track my patients?” said Wendy Deibert, CEO/ Founder, The VirtualEngine.

“Physicians want a single, easy-to-navigate system. Nurses want to provide more hands-on care. Make it simple to care for patients.”

[Read more of Wendy’s view from the ground.](#)

DOCTORS & MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

The American Medical Association says telehealth “can strengthen the patient-physician relationship and improve access for patients...” Even though providers understand the potential benefits of telehealth, they have concerns.

Challenges: Some caregivers are concerned that telehealth will impact the way they care for patients.

- Will telehealth will be a technological ordeal? Will this completely mess up my day?
- Will it frustrate my patients?
- Can I still be empathic across a video screen?
- Will I have to learn a bunch of new logins and multiple systems to track patients and outcomes?
- I have to go on-camera? Yikes!

Solutions: As you begin your plan, do a deep dive to understand how providers already work. Document and mimic those practices in your telehealth program.

Your goal: create a plan for a single, seamless system regardless of how care is delivered.

- Find a caregiver who is successfully using telehealth. Tell their stories and help them reach out to their peers.
- Emphasize seamless patient care and better outcomes.
- Create clear standards around how video and audio are presented to maintain and extend your brand quality. Give caregivers the resources and guidance to meet those standards. Telehealth is not shaky cellphone videos delivered from random locations.
- Document existing workflow so telehealth can mimic and enhance the appointment experience for caregivers and patients.

HEALTHCARE STAFF

Healthcare support staff are often the (overlooked) front line between patients and technology. Ensuring a smooth experience for both caregiver and patient is key to a successful telehealth program.

Challenges: Staff members must learn to schedule patients and deploy the technology behind telehealth.

- What do I need to set up for this appointment? How much time should I schedule?
- Has this patient ever had a telehealth appointment? What do I need to tell them?
- Does the patient have access to a device that we support?
- Has the caregiver ever done a telehealth appointment? What do they need?

“It’s not about bright shiny toys,” said Peter Kung. “It’s about how technology can improve and enhance what we are already doing. Take the technology and weave it into the workflow so that the clinical team sees it as the standard of care.”

[Read more of Peter’s view from 30,000 feet.](#)

Solutions: The best information you get about integrating (and improving) telehealth in your organization will come from the staff members who see and help your patients every day.

- Document every part of the process. Include written, audio, and video explanations to make it simple for staff.
- Make them the heroes. Show how they are helping patients and caregivers implement telehealth. (See *Sidebar: Tell Patient Stories With Care on page 8*)
- Help staff members create realistic patient expectations and positive outcomes.
- Give them the tools they need to create a great telehealth experience.

COMMUNITY

Telehealth may provide an opportunity to extend your brand story to an audience who may not be familiar with your care options.

Challenges: Community members will have a range of healthcare concerns and expectations.

- I have never visited your healthcare system. I don't know anything about you. Why should I use you for my healthcare?
- I am not a tech genius. Can I still have a telehealth appointment?
- I have chronic health issues. Why should I consider using your healthcare system?
- I am not familiar with telehealth. What can it do for me?

Solutions: Let the community get to know you. Demonstrate that telehealth provides better access to care directly within the community including clinics and homes.

- Tell your overall healthcare brand story. Telehealth is just a part of the larger continuum of care provided by your healthcare institution — but it may provide a new connection.
- Add telehealth to your overall community outreach plan. Demonstrate capabilities and showcase ease-of-use.
- Tell stories about decreased wait times, better access to appointments, and less travel.
- Tell patient success stories to build trust and familiarity. (See *Sidebar: Tell Patient Stories With Care* on page 8)

“Telehealth gives us a way to bring these (healthcare) resources right into our communities,” said Wendy Deibert. “The result? Better outcomes and services for a wider population.”

[Read more of Wendy's view from the ground.](#)

TELL PATIENT STORIES WITH CARE

While you may be excited to tell patient success stories, be aware of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Part of this law outlines strict patient information and privacy laws which you need to be aware of if you are talking about patients.

To protect patient privacy, frame your message so that the audience knows you are not referring to an individual. Never disclose patient information including name, height, ethnicity, location, age, or any other identifiable patient information. Even positive or congratulatory messages are off-limits. Stay general or create a composite patient experience.

If you have questions, you should speak with your in-house compliance officer or refer to the [HIPAA rules](#).

Summary

Telehealth is both the future and present of healthcare.

It works when technology becomes part of the workflow rather than just dropping gadgets in place. Well-documented systems, education, and brand expectations are hallmarks of success.

Get your core constituents excited about the benefits that telehealth will bring while also setting realistic expectations. Tell your brand story around providing the best on-demand, patient-focused care wherever and whenever patients need care.

The key to your success? Create a communications plan that works for caregivers, gives patients the support they need, and integrates telehealth into your brand offerings.



Stephanie Helline

OWNER +
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Are you ready to deliver your message about telehealth?

If your healthcare system is launching or planning a telehealth program, it can be challenging to reach the many groups who need consistent, targeted messaging built around your vision, plan, and goals.

Let's talk.

Working together, we'll build and execute a communication plan to successfully launch your telehealth program.

From internal communication to external messaging, our clients rely on us to take a thoughtful, creative approach to their needs.

Contact us and let's talk about how Strategic Health can help you with your communication plan.

RESOURCES:

- HRSA – [Telehealth Programs](#)
- American Telemedicine Association – [What is Telemedicine](#)
- Center for Connected Health Policy – [What is Telehealth](#)
- American Medical Association (AMA) – [Telemedicine](#)
- US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – [Summary of HIPAA Privacy Rule](#)