



# Nurturing Patient Confidence in Telemedicine

Telemedicine experienced rapid adoption as a result of the pandemic and is becoming an acceptable alternative to in-person consults. A **McKinsey study** found that telemedicine visits have stabilized at 38 times higher than before the pandemic, and account for up to 17% of visits across all specialties. Consumer sentiment was also positive. According to McKinsey about 40% of consumers surveyed said they will continue to use telemedicine, up from 11% prior to the pandemic.

The consumer and adoption numbers are heading in the right direction, but the work is far from over for healthcare systems who need to further integrate telemedicine to alleviate physician shortages and improve their financial picture. One of the obstacles to expanding telemedicine is patient trust, a key factor in retaining telemedicine patients, in establishing a good working foundation for new patients and in improving adoption of telemedicine in acute care.

Establishing patient trust and a warm, comforting environment is challenging in a virtual setting. **A Harvard Business Review article** outlines some of the issues challenging telemedicine patient trust and confidence. HBR and other sources largely focus on these areas:



**Trust in competence of the physician:** Consumers can search online for resumes of a physician, but the average patient is more interested in whether the physician is demonstrating competence in real time during their consult, communicating this competence through thoughtful comments, and presenting a clearly explained plan of action. Additionally, while a physician may be conducting a tele-consult from home or an office, the environment projected on the screen must appear highly professional to the patient and the patient's family to instill confidence.

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**Trust in the online medium:** Virtual care opens a Pandora's box of potential problems with telephony, voice latency and screen quality. From the physician's and/or hospital staff's perspective, it is imperative the technology is working correctly, and the physician will be able to conduct a consult without a glitch.



**Trust in the physician's empathy:** Empathy is a common theme throughout reports on patient satisfaction, and trust and is one of the most difficult challenges. Patients do not want to feel they are just one of many charts in a physician's day. They need to feel the physician is listening and caring about their specific medical condition. The very nature of online communications may lend an artificial quality to the conversation, so it is up to the physician to use eye contact and body language to convey as much empathy as possible.

At Eagle Telemedicine we call it 'webside manner' and recognize that not all physicians are comfortable with virtual conversations. However, as telemedicine continues to gain adoption, having an empathetic screen time presence will be imperative.



**Trust in physician access:** Patients prefer to have a continuing relationship with a physician, to foster trust in having a positive outcome. This can be more difficult when telemedicine providers have a rotating group of physicians. At Eagle Telemedicine we encourage a dedicated team approach, in which a limited number of physicians, or a "pod" of physicians, are assigned to each hospital to support consistency of care. This also greatly benefits hospital staff who can develop efficient working relationships with their specific group of telemedicine physicians.



**Trust in the care continuum:** Telemedicine is not a one-and-done dynamic. Patients need to trust that follow-ups and long-term care plans will be as carefully managed as in-person visits. This must involve physicians, staff, and the maintenance of technology to make sure medical records are up to date and new information is recorded and accessible while for future consults. That's why at Eagle Telemedicine our telemedicine physicians work directly in the hospital's EMR platform for comprehensive care visibility and seamless handoffs between telemedicine and on-site providers.

## Telemedicine Growth Depends on Trust

Patients and physicians saw the benefits of telemedicine during the pandemic and a little less than half of the patients are comfortable with continuing. We need to put into practice the elements that support trust, like empathy and demonstrating competence and technology that works, for telemedicine to thrive as a sustainable practice for enhancing patient care and outcomes and to better serve a growing patient population.

Learn more about patient and physician benefits of telemedicine,

**Contact Eagle today.**