

# Trends In Remote Healthcare Technology That Help Reduce Costs

**Digital innovations make it easier  
to stay engaged with care**



One of the biggest changes sweeping the healthcare industry in recent years is the use of remote and wireless technologies—a change that has accelerated exponentially with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for social distancing. Telehealth, smart devices for remote monitoring, wearables, apps and other digital healthcare innovations are making it easier for people to stay engaged with their care and providers to stay connected with their patients and colleagues, which helps keep costs under control.

Here are some of the trends in remote healthcare we're excited about, some already in use and some on the horizon.

# Smart technologies for remote patient monitoring

Sometimes called RPM, remote patient monitoring (or management) refers to collecting data from patients at home, usually via smart devices, and sharing it with care providers. There are now “smart” scales, blood pressure gauges, blood oxygen level monitors, wearable electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG) monitors and other data collection devices that connect with patients’ smart phones, laptops or tablets to transmit health information directly to providers. Specialized medical equipment isn’t necessarily needed, either: Popular consumer smart watches and fitness trackers increasingly include EKG, blood oxygen monitoring and other health apps.

**Reducing the need for in-person appointments or home care visits helps control costs for patients and providers alike.**

These types of technology have major implications for the way people with serious or chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure manage their care, along with post-operative patients or those in residential facilities. Reducing the need for in-person appointments or home care visits helps control costs for patients and providers alike. Meanwhile, with access to more consistent and accurate patient health data, providers can intervene as soon as there’s a problem to help prevent costly complications, ER visits and hospital admissions.





## Physical Therapy apps

For physical or occupational therapy to succeed, patients need to consistently perform the exercises their provider directs them to do at home. Unfortunately, many people don't, whether for lack of clarity about what to do, lack of motivation, or both. The new crop of physical therapy smart phone applications is changing that.

Both commercially available apps and apps available via providers or health plans offer patients interactive anatomical diagrams and videos and guidance for various exercises, which can, in some cases, be customized by the provider to create a patient-specific plan. Tracking features help keep patients accountable, allowing them to log their activity and progress and share that data directly with their provider. The goal is faster recovery times, less need for office visits, and less chance of reinjury.

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Tufts Health Plan recently piloted one such physical therapy app, Physera. We hope to make it available to more members in the future.

# The continued growth of Telehealth

The COVID-19 pandemic will end, but the telehealth revolution it sparked is here to stay. Industry analysts predict that the use of remote visits will expand beyond primary and urgent care to specialty care, long-term care facilities, dialysis centers, rehabilitation facilities and more. Improvements in technology, growing acceptance by patients and providers, and new regulations, payment models and privacy guidelines are expected to make telehealth an increasingly common and cost-effective way for patients to get their care.

**More members than ever are using the solution we offer, Telehealth Virtual Care provided by Teladoc®**

As a result, people who might otherwise have found it inconvenient or impossible to get to in-person visits can engage more proactively with their providers, for better outcomes. Providers, meanwhile, can connect with their patients and colleagues across a range of clinical settings more efficiently. In some cases, the provider can even see patients from the provider's own home, freeing up time and space for in-person appointments back at the office for those who need them. At Tufts Health Plan, we're experiencing the telehealth revolution firsthand. More members than ever are using the solution we offer, Telehealth Virtual Care provided by Teladoc®, and the feedback is overwhelmingly positive.





## 5G Wireless

5G, the fifth generation of cellular wireless technology, has the potential to transform healthcare, particularly for people in remote or rural areas without easy access to medical facilities. With its fast speeds and massive connection power, 5G will make telehealth more widely available and reliable. It will also allow providers based in different locations to quickly share large image files like MRIs, which on low bandwidth networks can take a long time to transmit, and often can't be sent or viewed successfully. With 5G, doctors will be able to share and receive critical diagnostic information much more quickly and efficiently, saving both minutes and dollars.



At Tufts Health Plan, we're excited about the ways technology is improving healthcare and controlling costs. We'll continue to work with our partners and providers to bring the best of healthcare technology to our members.

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