

Experts want telemedicine use to continue after rise in 2020

Posted on Monday, Mar 22, 2021

A panel of health experts from across Wisconsin said they expect digital telemedicine trends in health care to continue.

The group expects telehealth to be integrated into a hybridized virtual and in-person health care system moving forward.

Wrapping up the 2021 Wisconsin Technology Summit this week, the experts took part in a virtual discussion about the rise of televisits and telemedicine over the last year as a result of the pandemic.

“In 2019 there were a little less than a 100 million televisits,” said Dr. Asif Naseem, the president and CEO of health tech company PDS. “In 2020 there were over 1 billion.”

Naseem also said that while some procedures will never be conducted through a televisit, most therapy sessions, preoperative visits and postoperative visits should continue to be done through televisits. This is because it is safe, convenient, and the technology allows for physicians to still perform many of the functions they would if these visits were in-person, he said.

According to Jeri Koester, chief information officer at Marshfield Clinic Health System, Wisconsin still needs to reduce inefficiencies and cost while increasing access for people across the state. Koester said a lack of broadband access in rural

areas of Wisconsin limited online access to telemedicine for some residents. Broadband access across the state will be needed for a hybridized health care system to work well, she said.

“Our new normal needs to include both a physical and a virtual; it really needs to meet the patient where they are in their health journey and in their physical location,” Koester said. “Technology is going to play a huge component in that, and solving problems like our broadband access across the state will be needed.”

Dr. Rajeev Chaudhry, a physician at the Mayo Clinic who specializes in community internal medicine, acknowledged that lack of access to broadband services was problematic. However, a solution that has been put into practice by Chaudhry and others is making arrangements with local libraries and other public buildings that have WiFi access to set aside a room for patients to be able to meet with their physician virtually.

Using public libraries as virtual exam rooms can't continue on forever though, Naseem said.

He noted there has been a push from both public and private organizations to provide greater access to broadband services across the state and country. He claimed that “more has been done over the past year than was done in a decade before” in the push to expand broadband services.

However, according to Chaudhry, even as access to broadband service increases, people will still need to be pushed towards telemedicine until they see its value and the easier access to physicians it provides.

-By Grayson Sewell



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