EXPANDING DENTAL CARE BEYOND THE CLINIC

Perks of going virtual to close the gaps in access to dental services.

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Introduction

Traditional models do not work because of severe disparities in access to care.

COVID-19 has opened the floodgates of the disparities that exist within the United States healthcare system. It has come back to all or any as a surprising revelation that the present system spends excessively and achieves minimally. The United States spends 17-18% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare. It has been so for a decade now and is considered to be a substantial amount. Still, there are severe inequalities in access to care for low-income groups, people in racial and ethnic minorities, people living in rural areas, and people with complex medical problems and disabilities.

Due to inaccessibility to healthcare, people reach hospital rooms at an advanced stage of their ailment, which in turn leads to an increase in overall health costs. When cheaper modes of prevention become inaccessible, costlier modes of intervention become inevitable. This disparity in access to health care is extremely evident in dental care. Currently, the bulk of the United States population i.e., 60% don’t receive regular attention from a dentist, at least annually.
According to the American Dental Association (ADA), dental pain accounted for 2.1 million emergency room visits in 2010. The majority of these cases were due to dental decay, which would have been easily averted through regular care and hygiene.

From the perspective of the practice, a patient is the most valuable asset. The average Customer Lifetime Value of a dental patient is calculated to be $3,500. CLV is the prediction of the total worth of a client to a business over the entirety of their relationship. It’s not simply the number of new patients that matters. It’s the full profit that those patients deliver over time that may build or break the business. In this context, every patient gained or lost is of utmost importance for a dental practice.

Innovations like teledentistry can alleviate both these situations i.e, to provide cost-effective treatment for the patient as well as to generate adequate revenue for the practice. Teledentistry is a technology enabled service that allows dentists to interact with patients remotely to provide guidance, virtual consultation and education.

Teledentistry improves and retains the dentist-patient relationship at an optimum, thereby increasing the CLV. It reflects a broader, dynamic care landscape that’s moving toward innovation, integration, and convenient care. Dental care providers adopting teledentistry are definitely on a path to innovation.
Teledentistry has opened a brand new realm of opportunity for patient and health care providers alike. It has made dental services more accessible and convenient for the patients and also has rescued the dental offices from revenue drop, in the age of pandemic. Teledentistry is found to be on par with real-time consultations. Over the years it has proved to be helpful in remote dental screening, diagnosing, providing consultation, and proposing treatment plans.

Dentists are now able to consult and diagnose certain cases virtually, before meeting the patient personally, if needed. It’s convenient for each party to assess the matter earlier than time, particularly if the patient must take antibiotics or other treatments until the patient books a meeting.

It offers a broad spectrum of solutions delivered to remote patients via video conferencing or phone connectivity.
**Teleconsultation**

The most common form of teledentistry is teleconsultation in which patients seek consultation from dental specialists using telecommunication. In the current COVID-19 pandemic it supports the patients in continuing their therapy during quarantine and lockdown.

**Telediagnosis**

Telediagnosis is the use of technology to exchange images and data to make a diagnosis of an oral lesion. It has also served as a reliable adjunct for the screening of malignant lesions. As most of these lesions are often directly evident, telediagnosis can be made by dental photography.

**Telemonitoring**

The employment of telemonitoring replaces the frequent physical visits for normal monitoring of treatment outcomes and disease progression with virtual visits. During this pandemic, telemonitoring appeared to be a promising tool in the remote monitoring of surgical and non-surgical dental patients. It also helps in reducing costs and waiting times.

**Teletriage**

The safe, appropriate, and timely disposition of patient symptoms via smartphone by specialists is teletriage. It has been used for remote assessment of school children and those in far off places.

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Teledentistry has drastically improved the standard of management of dental patients. It has got a positive impact across multiple dental specialties. It has led to several advancements in numerous branches of dentistry.

**Orthodontics**

Minor emergencies such as rubber ligature displacement, irritation due to the orthodontic appliance can be solved by telecommunication, thus limiting visits to the dental office.

**Endodontics**

Teledentistry enables dentists from remote locations to provide root canal treatment. This is done by accessing patients’ dental images and X-rays. There is no statistically significant difference in the interpretation of periapical lesions between the images viewed locally and those transmitted through a video-conferencing system.
Pediatric and preventive dentistry
For children who are afraid of dentists, the method of teledentistry has been demonstrated as a high-quality alternative. It reduces their fear and anxiety compared to clinical examination in real-time.

Oral medicine, diagnosis, and radiology
Oral lesions can be electronically photographed using a 50 mm macro lens and circular illumination system. Specialists of oral medicine independently analyze these images and clinical information. They make the diagnosis and electronically return the results.

Teledentistry Can:
- Improve dental hygiene
- Be more affordable
- Improve access to care
- Reduce the time staff spend away from the workplace
- Reduce the time taken by staff to envision dental providers head to head
- Make in-office appointment times more accessible to the needy
- Align with patients’ needs for modern communication
- Have a novel capability to extend providers’ services to scores of new patients
Virtual care could enhance the patient-dentist relationship that is mutually beneficial, powered by digital inclusivity and innovation. It enables the needy to access care hassle-free, even in remote surroundings. Through virtual care, a patient can grasp everything he will be cared for, though provider and receiver are miles apart. In this context, teledentistry could be a key factor for dental practices nowadays.

How to implement Teledentistry in your practice

1. Selecting the appropriate software
2. Informing patients about the virtual visit
3. Scheduling virtual visits
4. Triaging patients
5. Patient information at fingertips
6. Teleconsultation with the dentist
7. Examination via HD video
8. Chatting
9. Treatment and medication
10. Prescription and/or follow-up
11. Getting paid
12. Patient data
1. **Selecting the appropriate software**

There are dozens of software tools available to dentists that they can use to conduct a virtual visit. Go for a teledentistry platform that’s comprehensive enough to meet all your needs, on a long-term basis. Also, ensure HIPAA compliance.

2. **Informing patients about the virtual visit**

Let the patients know they can schedule a virtual visit. For this, make use of your communication tools — sending patient emails, updating your website, and outgoing phone messages. Add a teledentistry presence to your SEO strategy too.

3. **Scheduling virtual visits**

Make virtual visits a part of your dentists’ schedules. Make sure that telehealth is included as an option patients can select while scheduling online.

4. **Triaging patients**

A dental assistant can ascertain the patient’s needs before the appointment. Thereby, it could be decided whether teledentistry is the right mode of care delivery. The assistant should be competent enough to determine whether an in-person visit is necessary instead of teledentistry.

5. **Patient information at fingertips**

For ensuring a smooth teledentistry visit, all info about the patient should be collected. Details like patient health history, allergies, medications, insurance, and method of payment need to be noted.

A digital intake form for the patient to key in all these details is a must in a comprehensive teledentistry platform.

6. **Teleconsultation with the dentist**

The patient is to be informed that the doctor is available and is ready for the visit.

7. **Examination via HD video**

While the dentist asks the patient what’s going on, they should also direct the patient to show them. More questions seeking answers help determine diagnosis and treatment.

8. **Chatting**

A teledentistry platform should include a complimentary chat function. This will allow the patient to jot down questions or concerns, and upload photos or videos.

9. **Treatment and medication**

If the treatment plan includes a decision to keep the patient from coming to the practice, the dentist may take a different approach than usual. If an in-person visit is necessary, the appointment needs to be scheduled.

10. **Prescription and/or follow-up**

The patient's condition may require starting on a prescription. It also might include a plan to then visit the office in two to three days.

11. **Getting paid**

Virtual visits also include a mode to collect a payment or copay. To bill insurance companies, use the appropriate teledentistry codes.

12. **Patient data**

The most efficient method available should be made use of, to get patient data and charting into their standard PMS.
Teledentistry in CareStack

CS Virtual Office™ from CareStack is an all-in-one telehealth software to manage online scheduling, teledentistry consultation, and patient collection using Text-to-Pay. Integrating CS Virtual Office™ into your dental practice will ensure regular appointment volume and revenue during COVID times.

Connect
with patients through online appointment scheduling.

Consult
face to face with patients through telehealth conferencing.

Collect
outstanding patient balances through two-way text messages.

40% of patients prefer online appointment booking and paperless onboarding.

Keep 100% of your patients and staff safe through telehealth screenings.

80% of patients always read and respond to a text message.

Nicholas S. Geller
Owner, Now Care Dental

“I could be on a beach in Tahiti and be able to access the dental chart, notes, prescriptions, or insurance details of a patient if required. We could never have done this in the past.”

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