

## **Virtual Care versus Traditional Clinical Visits Post COVID 19 Pandemic**

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The practice of treating a variety of medical illnesses without meeting the patient is known as telemedicine. Healthcare professionals can diagnose a patient's condition and handle their issues remotely via telehealth platforms like live video, audio, or instant messaging. This can be offering them medical advice, guiding them through exercises they can do at home, or referring them to a nearby facility or provider. The development of telemedicine apps, which allow patients to get care directly from their phones or tablets, is even more intriguing. Of course, it can be difficult to manage some conditions remotely. Telemedicine is frequently utilized to deliver specialized services, manage chronic disorders, and treat common illnesses. The remote practitioner will advise a patient to seek in-person medical attention if they have an urgent or critical ailment. Virtual care is a broad phrase that refers to any form of distant patient interaction used by healthcare practitioners. This can be following up after an in-person appointment, keeping an eye on vitals following surgery, or answering any inquiries about their diagnosis, condition, or treatment strategy. Simply expressed, the phrase "virtual care" refers to all the ways that patients and doctors can interact digitally and in real-time.

While virtual care is a much larger word that applies to a range of digital healthcare services, telemedicine refers to long-distance patient care. Physical patient care is a traditional health care method laying a strong foundational structure as compared to virtual care but nowadays specifically after the covid-19 outbreak a significant rise in virtual care setups has been seen and it is increasing way more swiftly than any other domain. One of the major reasons behind this accelerated shift is real-time access and cost-effectiveness of virtual setups reducing overall follow-up rates and waiting times. In a study by Herzer and Pronovost (2021) has depicted that using virtual care visits can reduce the entire cost of patient care for any suitable illnesses. (1)

Virtual visits have the effect of lowering operational costs associated with providing healthcare, particularly in general consultation domains. Under the right circumstances, greater savings can be achieved when virtual care is used more frequently. Furthermore, virtual visits are an option if one does not have any emergencies because traditional visits these days are primarily important for surgeries and crises. On-demand, direct-to-consumer video (or virtual) visits are one of the telemedicine services that are growing the fastest. Because virtual care appointments do not include a physical examination in person, some have questioned their effectiveness, efficiency, and value. Healthcare has virtual care that is programmed both retrospectively and cross-sectionally to address these concerns (2)

### **VIRTUAL VERSUS TRADITIONAL CARE**

Virtual versus traditional in some points, as scheduling, laboratory investigation and behavioral counselling. In scheduled appointments through virtual primary care, the patient can develop a relationship with a primary care physician where the same doctor is available for scheduled appointments. The virtual primary care physician of the patient's choice can be seen, and subsequent appointments can be made with that physician. Whereas in traditional visits for primary diseases there is no exact time to go and meet most of the time patient have to wait for a doctor and after that, there are fewer chances of bonding as these trips are unplanned so patients cannot determine if the same doctor available to care for their needs. In addition, every new patient-doctor needs to review the patient file to prescribe them otherwise that may result a problem for any severe disease patient. (3,4)

In regards to laboratory investigations in virtual care Patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol may require lab test where the patient need to be physically present Following up and counselling through virtual care, doctors have access to counsel patients on changes in their behaviors. There are health concerns such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol are all diseases that require a combination of behavior change and often medication to treat. It will allow the doctor and patient to have recurring visits to address lifestyle circumstances and choices that may adversely affect the patient's health studied by Shah et al. (2018.) According to the study "patients receiving behavioral counselling lost more than 8% of body weight during the first year and, at year 8, 50% of patients maintained a 5% or more loss." The results of behavior counselling by a doctor leave a powerful impact on patients because it involves multiple discussions with mostly the same doctor, and it creates a relationship between the two. More services are provided through Virtual primary care as compared to the traditional visits and that is good for patients' health, and it diminishes the financial cost of healthcare (5,6,7)

The principal causes of high-cost claims are reduced via virtual primary care: for those medical conditions 1) cardiovascular disease, 2) Cancer, and 3) Musculoskeletal Conditions. These health condition often spend \$50,000–\$100,000 annually on medical expenses. The three diagnostic groups that account for most of their medical expenses are cancer, cardiovascular illness, and musculoskeletal diseases research by Al-Sofiani et al. (2021). Primary care is the best method to lessen the impact of these high healthcare expenditures, if not completely remove them. According to research published in the Journal of Family Practice, the cost of healthcare was 33% cheaper for patients who saw a primary care doctor frequently. 1 Osteoarthritis is treated by primary care physicians to lower the risk of heart disease and avoid major orthopedic procedures, diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. To identify cancer types early and even eliminate precancerous tumors, they also organize cancer tests including mammograms and colonoscopies. These causes of high-cost claims are not addressed by conventional telemedicine. (8)

### **CURRENT VIRTUAL HEALTH CARE CHALLENGES**

The traditional care model is well known, but recently the demand for utilizing virtual care model is increasing specially post pandemic, yet there are several challenges in order to be more effective for providing care to patients.

Some of the major challenges of existing virtual care setups include data privacy and regulation, patient engagement, and access. Decision-making gets extremely difficult on call without examining the patient physically. Often time patients miss virtual appointments, and it affects health care practitioners' schedule, working hours, and ability to assess a certain describing complaint over the phone. Similarly, another major challenge is not all information describing a patient's health situation is digitally transmittable via phone thus raising a critical risk of missing or leaving undiagnosed a critical symptom from the patient's health record as mentioned by Kotecha et al. (2015). It has also been seen that doctors made comparatively more mistakes while making the diagnosis in a virtual appointment over the phone, email, or app. However, digital consultation works fine in case of a minor problem, but they are less effective in many cases, primarily during a check-up of a chronic disease patient, there are stronger chances of missing potentially severe symptoms that can be properly examined in only physical session. (9)

Similarly, it's also difficult to reduce psychological discomfort and anxiety amongst patients thus we can say virtual care is not a good option for patient counselling. Another frequently observed issue is an increased number of patients calls for minor issues, even issues for which they would not have contacted a doctor in a traditional care setting. Another health care challenge observed during virtual care is it's more time-consuming in comparison to primary care sessions. It has also been found that for virtual sessions doctors have to spare more time firstly for preparing the call, then reviewing the health report history of the patient, and finally making a checklist for categorizing patients as per their disease and need for consultation. A recent survey has reported that a virtual care consultation session takes twice as much time as a physical care consultation (10)

Also, the lack of professional virtual care training, proper guidance to doctors, and limited technical support are some other noteworthy challenges and major hurdles in the proper expansion of virtual patient care. Although after the pandemic a rapid domain shift towards virtual care is seen, however, doctors still need to set up and learn the technicalities of formal virtual care consultation along with troubleshooting alternative systems. While with increasing shift of physical to virtual work almost in every domain a rapid advancement in virtual health care settings has also been observed particularly due to human- human spread disease, since it raised a concern amongst individuals that virtual care is the only quickest possible solution in such cases. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has sparked advancements across the healthcare spectrum, with a major concentration on outpatient care delivery via virtual care tools. The number of virtual visits increased by more than 15%, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (I.e., video or phone-based visits). (11)

## CONCLUSION

When viewed in its entirety, the usage of virtual visits has grown significantly during the pandemic, and there is strong interest in continuing to use these choices for primary care delivery beyond the pandemic. Virtual care has served as a fundamental part of medical care delivery through the Coronavirus in an effort for delivering safe, reliable, efficient, and time-sensitive health care to patients. Virtual care is equally as effective as usual physical consultations for patient care in the recovery phases and during rehabilitation.

Traditional care visits are not replaceable specially in for chronic diseases, however virtual care has proven that it can be utilized in an extremely efficient manner if proper training and guidance is provided to both the patient as well as doctor. It can not only reduce the time constraint that is one of the major issues in a traditional setting where patients have to wait for hours till their turn whether it be a severe issue or a simple consultation. Only patients having critical issue needs to visit doctor in person while rest all can book virtual care consultation. Yet challenges remain to exist forcing clinicians, and healthcare organizations to adopt virtual care delivery models to overcome those challenges and raising expectations of changing regulations, health policies and billing practices to address the patients demands of virtual care to caliber with in person visit while sustaining business viability.

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