



Getting Started With Telehealth

Featured Expert: Alissa Lamoureux, DO, FAOCD, FAAD

Telehealth has opened many doors to providers and patients alike. The ability to offer patients vital healthcare services via videoconferencing or other remote technology increases access to physicians and specialists for patients while enabling providers to increase revenue potential and improve overall efficiency.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a surge in telehealth interest from providers who want to protect themselves, their staff, and their patients from exposure while continuing to keep their practices open (even virtually).

Dermatologists and aesthetic practitioners are well-suited for integrating telehealth. In this guide, we've teamed with board-certified dermatologist Alissa Lamoureux, DO, FAOCD, FAAD, who shares her own experiences and success with implementing telehealth while providing valuable insight and advice to providers.

Meet Our Expert

ALISSA LAMOUREUX

DO, FAOCD, FAAD

BOARD CERTIFIED DERMATOLOGIST

Alissa Lamoureux, DO, FAOCD, FAAD, is a board-certified dermatologist providing high-quality medical, surgical and cosmetic dermatology to patients throughout central Massachusetts and beyond. Skin Dermatology is located in her hometown of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, where she and her team provide world-class Dermatologic care to her community and beyond.

Upon application to medical school, Dr. Lamoureux was accepted into a competitive medical program at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. Dr. Lamoureux went on to complete two residencies in Florida, where she earned the coveted titles of chief resident, resident of the year, and resident teacher of the year.

While she received numerous accolades as an internal medicine physician, Dr. Lamoureux's goal was always to be a dermatologist. During her extensive dermatology training at Broward Health Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, she worked with world-renowned medical, surgical, cosmetic dermatologists, dermatopathologists, plastic surgeons, oncologists, and allergists. Dr. Lamoureux was honored to present her research at the national conference of the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology.

As a well-respected dermatologist in the medical community, Dr. Lamoureux opened Skin Dermatology with the sole purpose of providing a full spectrum of dermatologic care to her patients, from acne and skin cancer treatments to cosmetic services.

A proud fellow of the American Osteopathic College of Dermatology and the American Academy of Dermatology, as well as a member of the American Osteopathic Association, Dr. Lamoureux enjoys spending time with her husband, Michael, and their two young children.



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Telehealth helps minimize patient contact and exposure, protecting both staff and patients.

Understanding telehealth

Telehealth has opened doors for both providers and patients alike, allowing patients to be seen remotely with the help of technology.

Telehealth applications can include the following:

Synchronous This involves **live, two-way videoconferencing**. The virtual encounter must be of an amount and nature that would be sufficient to meet the key components and/or requirements of the same service when rendered via a face-to-face interaction.

Asynchronous This “**store and forward technology**” allows for digital communication with the patient. This is not 2-way video communication, but rather a means for a patient to provide a photo or video of a concern, which allows the provider to respond virtually to that request without a face to face encounter.

Telephone or Electronic Media Patient, guardian, or referring provider **calls or communicates digitally to discuss a problem**. I can then evaluate and manage the patient through discussion. This is a time-based charge based on medical consultation and review.

Providers should ensure they understand the difference between the different types of “virtual” visits, as reimbursement can vary significantly per payer.

Why telehealth?

I believe a strong doctor-patient relationship is the foundation for high-quality patient care. We utilize telehealth to support—not replace—traditional in-person provider care. With telemedicine, care providers can continue to care for patients in-person, while still providing the flexibility and convenience of seeing patients remotely for new concerns, follow up visits, skin issues, and education, when appropriate or necessary. Providers complete visit notes and submit billing as they would if they were providing this service in their office.

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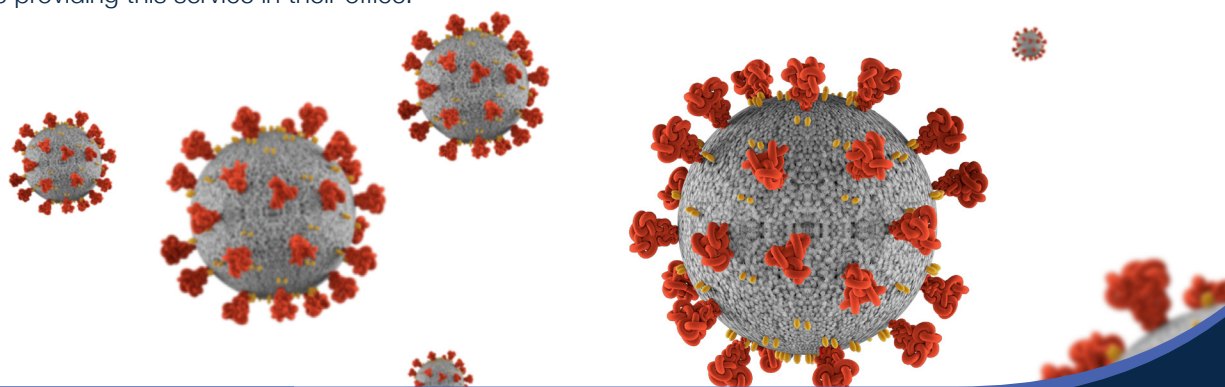
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Dr. Alissa Lamoureux

Telehealth and COVID-19

As healthcare providers, we have all been impacted by the recent global pandemic. Using multiple modalities like telemedicine can help take the stress off the healthcare system, keeping patients out of emergency rooms and helping keep fears and anxieties at bay.

Telehealth also helps minimize patient contact and exposure, allowing better adherence to social distancing guidelines and reducing risk of exposure.





Benefits to patient

This solution is one we view as not only a weapon in the fight against COVID-19, but a valuable tool for our patients moving forward. Telemedicine will offer our patients the following advantages:

- ⑥ Enhanced face-to-face medicine
- ⑥ Increased access to care
- ⑥ Decreased commuting and waiting room time
- ⑥ Ongoing revenue stream
- ⑥ Reduced risk of exposure to a new illness
- ⑥ Improved patient engagement and satisfaction
- ⑥ Significant decrease in wait time for an appointment
- ⑥ Convenience for patients, who no longer have to take off work or pick children up from school for appointments

The overall response from our patients has been positive; patients view telemedicine as a simple and convenient solution.

What can you do with telehealth?

Telehealth allows physicians to view, diagnose and develop treatment plans for many skin conditions remotely based on high-resolution digital images and videos provided either synchronously (2-way video) or asynchronously (store and forward).

Medical conditions

In my practice, we offer telehealth visits for the following medical conditions for all ages, from infants to the elderly:

- Routine dermatologic care for skin concerns such as acne, rashes, hair loss, dry skin, flaking scalp, increased sweating
- Ongoing care for chronic problems such as psoriasis, eczema, lupus, rosacea
- New problems such as a concerning spot
- Aesthetic consultations

From a consultation perspective, telehealth can be an amazing tool for cosmetic providers. We also have begun to offer telehealth cosmetic consultations that typically fall under one of the following:

Cosmetic Consultations for concerns such as:

- Facial volume loss, unwanted pigment, uneven pigment, melasma, sunspots, tattoo removal, unwanted hair, wrinkles, skin laxity, cellulite, non-invasive body contouring, acne scars, stretch marks, scars, dilated facial blood vessels, unwanted veins, red spots, hair loss, lip enhancement, eyelash enhancement
- Follow up consultations to evaluate results and make plans for ongoing treatments

Skin Care Consultations to help:

- Establish daily skin care regimens or to make changes to current routines.
- Management of the aging face through cosmeceuticals
- In-office aesthetics such as facials, chemical peels, etc.

These consultations allow patients to express their concerns and expectations of their end result. From there, we can partner to develop a comprehensive treatment plan and discuss the estimated pricing. Through this platform, sufficient information can be given to the patient for them to make an informed decision. This can be performed all from the comfort of their own home.

We will discount treatments for new patient consultations if they place a deposit at time of consultation, whether virtual or in-office.

Laws and Regulations

With the increase in technology usage coupled with physician shortages across the country, telehealth is a now viewed as a viable option to treat our patients. With that comes the need for laws, regulations and industry practices that ensure it is a feasible option from a process, reimbursement, and clinical care perspective.

There are many different regulations that providers must be aware of prior to offering this service, as there are a few different entities. A provider should ensure they review all guidance from:

- HIPAA
- State Medical Boards
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- Commercial Private Payers

HIPAA Compliance

With the regulations prior to COVID-19, a HIPAA compliant platform was required for synchronous visits.

Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare providers are authorized to utilize a wide array of telecommunication systems such as Zoom, doxy.me, Skype, and FaceTime. The HIPAA compliant regulation has been removed allowing any provider with a 2-way camera to take advantage of telehealth to care for their patients. There is no requirement for integration with your current EHR software either.

According to a statement dated March 30, 2020, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) “will exercise its enforcement discretion and will not impose penalties for noncompliance with the regulatory requirements under the HIPAA Rules against covered health care providers in connection with the good faith provision of telehealth during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency. This notification is effective immediately.”

Under this Notice, covered health care providers may use popular applications that allow for video chats to provide telehealth without risk that OCR might seek to impose a penalty for noncompliance with the HIPAA Rules related to the good faith provision of telehealth during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency. These apps include:

- Apple FaceTime
- Facebook Messenger video chat
- Google Hangouts video
- Zoom
- Skype

Keep in mind, however, that the notice also states “Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, and similar video communication applications are public facing, and should not be used in the provision of telehealth by covered health care providers.”





Telehealth and Medicare

Additionally, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services has broadened access to telehealth services for Medicare patients, allowing a greater range of flexibility. As of March 6, 2020, "Under this new waiver, Medicare can pay for office, hospital, and other visits furnished via telehealth across the country and including in patient's places of residence."

For more information, see the Medicare Telemedicine Health Care Provider Fact Sheet.

Considerations when choosing a telehealth platform

My office's current telehealth system is now part of our EHR/Practice Management suite, which allows for an integrated workflow from pre-visit accumulation of private health information, documentation during the visit and coding/billing. Our team has been fully trained through training material and webinars geared towards our specialty.

Prior to the pandemic, our EHR/Practice Management Software supplier did not offer a compliant solution for telehealth, but it was in development. We made the decision to wait for the release of our provider's compliant telehealth system. It helped us to wait on this solution, as it allowed us to develop a plan and understanding of the complex world of telehealth.

The benefits of telehealth software

I recommend looking for a solution that is in the healthcare provider space, as they are more likely to adapt to the ever-changing requirements of Telehealth. If you choose a non-healthcare provider, chances are when regulations change, potentially after the COVID 19 pandemic has ended, you will be looking for another software provider.

This may lead to added cost for the practice, additional staff and patient training, as well as potential patient dissatisfaction and interference of work-flow.