

POSITION STATEMENT: TELEMEDICINE

Telemedicine is the use of technology to provide health care from a distance, such as through video conferencing or over the phone. U.S. Pain Foundation supports the use of telemedicine as an important and innovative form of health care delivery.

Telemedicine is typically used to overcome access barriers for patients with limited travel abilities, such as individuals with disabilities or the elderly, and patients in rural communities, who may have to travel long distances for appropriate care. It also can be used to provide immediate care in emergencies, especially if the patient cannot get to an emergency room. Telemedicine can take place using a variety of communications methods, including telephone, email, videoconference, digital imaging, and other forms of technology.

If employed appropriately, telemedicine can provide important benefits to patients, including: increased access to health care, especially for at-risk groups; improved adherence to clinical advice; and reduced cost of patient care. While it cannot replace in-office assessments provided by medical professionals, patients should have access to telemedicine. Toward this end, telemedicine service should be included in both private and public insurance plans.

The benefits of telemedicine have been well-documented. A study published in the *Clinical Journal of Pain* reviewed eight Canadian patients with chronic pain who each lived about 200 miles from their respective doctors.¹ Researchers found that both patients and doctors saved time and money by meeting virtually. The visits were follow-ups to review patient progress, change medication, or offer counseling. Another study again found that doctors and patients using telemedicine for chronic pain follow-up care may save time and money.²

Telemedicine may also, in some cases, be more effective than standard care, according to researchers at Indiana University School of Medicine, particularly when all the potential of technology is harnessed for tracking patient well-being.³ A study of 250 patients compared those receiving telemedicine to those receiving traditional care from a general practitioner. The telemedicine group was asked to record their levels of pain by phone or online. Doctors used a special algorithm to adjust medication based on the patients' responses. After one year, patients in the telemedicine group said their pain improved by 30 percent, while patients receiving standard care said their pain worsened.

U.S. Pain Foundation supports legislative action at both state and federal levels to make available benefits of telemedicine to all patient populations, but especially those with limited access to care for physical or geographic reasons.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16691087>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19484320>

³ <http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2014/07/20/telemedicine-may-ease-chronic-pain/1ENXEzLQJnfkzwY1ZXXw4L/story.html>