Telehealth: Connecting to Patients Anytime, Anywhere

An Everbridge White Paper

Introduction

Telehealth is the future of healthcare. According to the 2014 World Market for Telehealth report from HIS Technology, the number of patients using telehealth will increase to about 7 million in 2018. Telehealth solutions fall into two broad categories. Remote patient monitoring solutions use a wired or wireless connection to link home healthcare equipment (heart monitors, dialysis equipment, etc.) to the Internet and then securely report patient data back to a healthcare provider.

Online or digital communications solutions, on the other hand, allow physicians to conduct consultations using a combination of text, voice, and video in lieu of actual in-person visits. For busy doctors, these capabilities can be immensely valuable tool in providing care efficiently and effectively.

Optimally, in the case of an online video consultations, patients call the offices to schedule the e-visit the same way they would schedule in-person visits. Office staff then initiate the calls on secure devices (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) via secure connections. The physicians can document the visits using standard processes and their electronic medical records systems. Patients can send digital pictures, when necessary, that can be attached to the records.

Are Telehealth Calls Reimbursable?

When it comes time for billing, most private insurance carriers (and in some specific instances, Medicaid and Medicare) pay 100% of the normal billing code. Telehealth visits just require a "GT" modifier in the coding. A traditional phone call is not considered an e-visit. In order to be reimbursable, the digital consultation has to be in real-time using face-to-face video, and utilizing technology that is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

While digital consultations can be conducted almost anywhere, most payers require that the calls be conducted from the physicians' offices, hospitals, or other similar facilities that can ensure a modicum of privacy. Having a HIPAA-compliant telehealth solution is also a must in order to protect patient privacy and avoid costly HIPAA violations.

Telehealth solutions that are properly encrypted also allow providers and patients to instantly share lab results, vitals, images, referrals, prescriptions, or discharge instructions using HIPAA-compliant text and photo messages. That information can be communicated to the patient and to other providers.

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Selecting a Telehealth Solution

With telehealth being a rapidly growing part of the healthcare market (GlobalData indicates that the worldwide telehealth and telemedicine market was set to grow 14 percent between 2011 and 2018), new vendors are rapidly emerging to meet the needs of providers. Not all solutions are created equally, however, so hospitals and physician practices should carefully evaluate potential vendors. There are several key criteria to keep in mind:

HIPAA Compliance

Providers should deploy telehealth solutions that ensure the correct measures are taken to prevent data breaches,

and that meet all HIPAA requirements. Data stored on digital diagnostic tools and other devices should also be protected from unauthorized access or other data breaches. The solution should protect and encrypt data at rest on the device and in transit over the network. That means the solution should utilize strategies such as public/private key encryption and an encryption key exchange mechanism. Messages and databases should also be fully encrypted.

Real-Time Capabilities

Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurers require that the telehealth solution enables real-time audio, video, and texting capabilities in order to ensure reimbursement.

Ease of Use

It should be simple and intuitive for physicians, administrative staff, and patients to schedule, initiate and participate in telehealth interactions. Nearly half of all users stop using an app with a poor user experience.

Platform Agnostic

Both doctors and patients use a wide variety of computing devices to communicate, so your telehealth platform should support desktop systems, laptops, tablets, and a variety of mobile platforms (Windows, Android, Apple iOS). The solution should also support WiFi, broadband Internet and cellular connections so that you can connect with patients from any location.

Robust Connectivity

A video call with a patient is only effective if both participants can hear and see each other, and if the call isn't cut off after a few minutes because of a network problem. Ensure that your solution and your underlying network infrastructure (whether it is wired or wireless) can maintain a robust connection.

Vendor Reliability

Perform due diligence on the technology vendor. Talk to existing customers, evaluate the vendor's financial viability, and examine their product and technology roadmap for the future.

Business Performance

Make sure the solution meets your clinical and business needs first; don't select a solution based solely on technical or budgetary concerns. Without the functionality you need, no solution will provide the benefit you are looking for, no matter how inexpensive or easy to implement it is.

Conclusion

It is clear that telehealth is changing the way doctors communicate with their patients. The ability to collaborate and offer care via text, voice and video allows doctors to increase productivity without sacrificing the quality of their care. With a telehealth solution that fits the above criteria, you truly can connect with patients from anywhere, anytime, without violating HIPAA privacy rules.

About Everbridge

Everbridge is the leading unified critical communications platform trusted by corporations and communities of all sizes that need to reach the right people for immediate action, collaboration, and decision-making. Connecting more than 100 million people and internet-connected devices, the company provides reassurance that secure, compliant messages are delivered, locally and globally, received and responded to, no matter the recipient's location. Everbridge is based in Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Beijing and London. For more information, visit www.everbridge.com, read the company blog, http://www.everbridge.com/blog, and follow on Twitter and Facebook.

THE ONLY END-TO-END PLATFORM

• **HipaaBridge:** Use HipaaBridge for secure clinical communication and care team collaboration to drive increased workflow efficiencies and improved patient outcomes.

• **Mass Notification:** Use Mass Notification to reach clinicians and employees about emergency situations and mass casualty events – across smartphones, email, SMS, push notifications and other modalities.

• **IT Alerting:** Use IT Alerting to help restore system outages and quickly keep internal and external stakeholders informed.

• **Incident Management:** Use Incident Management with pre-defined notification procedures to speed up STEMI alerts and notify necessary hospital personnel faster to ensure patients receive life-saving treatment in record time.

• **On-Call Scheduling:** Use On-Call Scheduling for real-time shift calendars and integrated on-call notifications to automate the tedious process of contacting off-duty staff.

About Everbridge HipaaBridge

In the modern healthcare setting, clinicians require a care team collaboration solution that enables them to devote their time to patient care – instead of time consuming manual tasks our the use of outdated technology.

Everbridge's HIPAA compliant secure messaging mobile application, HipaaBridge (formerly HipaaChat), meets this need by improving clinician workflows so that you can spend your time doing what you do best – providing excellent patient care. HipaaBridge provides a secure, care team collaboration solution that enables you to send text messages to colleagues, hold video calls with patients and share photos and other critical information all without violating HIPAA privacy rules. Simply put, with HipaaBridge, you can be in two places at once, enabling you to collaborate, triage, transfer and refer more effectively, reducing costs and improving patient outcomes.

HipaaBridge is fully integrated into the Everbridge Unified Critical Communication Platform – the most scalable and reliable platform to support all of your emergency and clinical communication needs, driving ROI and ease of use with one solution.