Telehealth and Data at the Forefront of Value-Based Care

By Dr. Charlie Miraglia, M.D.

The healthcare industry is currently in a state of unprecedented transformation. Hospitals and health systems are migrating from a fee-for-service to a value-based model, causing leaders to re-evaluate how they provide care to their patient populations. The rapid rise of technological advancements has also contributed to this change. More and more patients are requesting medical advice outside of the hospital, with many leaving traditional care models behind for convenient outpatient clinics or retail providers, such as CVS or Walgreens.

This survey highlights how leading healthcare organizations are using telehealth and remote patient monitoring to provide value to their patient populations. Having access to patients and the data generated throughout their care journey, even when that journey takes them outside the walls of the hospital, will be crucial for healthcare organizations to not only survive but to thrive in this new healthcare environment. Furthermore, to decrease costs and mitigate risk - two of the main driving forces behind telehealth initiatives - successful implementation of remote monitoring and other patient engagement solutions will become extremely important.

Drivers of Change

The value-based model did not spring up overnight. The advent of the Accountable Care model has forced organizations to examine how they are providing value-based services to clients. Some current key drivers of change in healthcare are:

•Rise of consumerism in healthcare

Today, more than ever before, patients are treating healthcare like any other necessary goods or services for which they shop. They do their research, look for the best deal, and hunt for the closest and most convenient care location. The patient is now a consumer of healthcare. This has resulted in a hyper-competitive environment, where a multitude of players and factors influence

a patient's healthcare decisions every day. Healthcare organizations are looking for innovative ways to provide value to not only attract but also retain these patients.

  •Value-based reimbursements

In the near future, hospitals and health systems will no longer be paid based on the number of patients that pass through their doors. There are emerging guidelines that will dictate reimbursements across the board. Organizations must work to get patients healthier faster, or keep them out of the hospitals all together.

  •Onslaught of new technologies

Healthcare has traditionally been a technological dinosaur. Now, the industry is slowly shifting into the modern times. Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) now have all pertinent patient information safely housed in electronic systems, which can then be integrated or linked to external systems. These external solutions can include Customer Relationship Management (CRM), LIS, HIS, and Billing systems. Data can already be viewed and shared across all of these systems - the next step is taking action on this data to help improve outcomes while reducing costs.
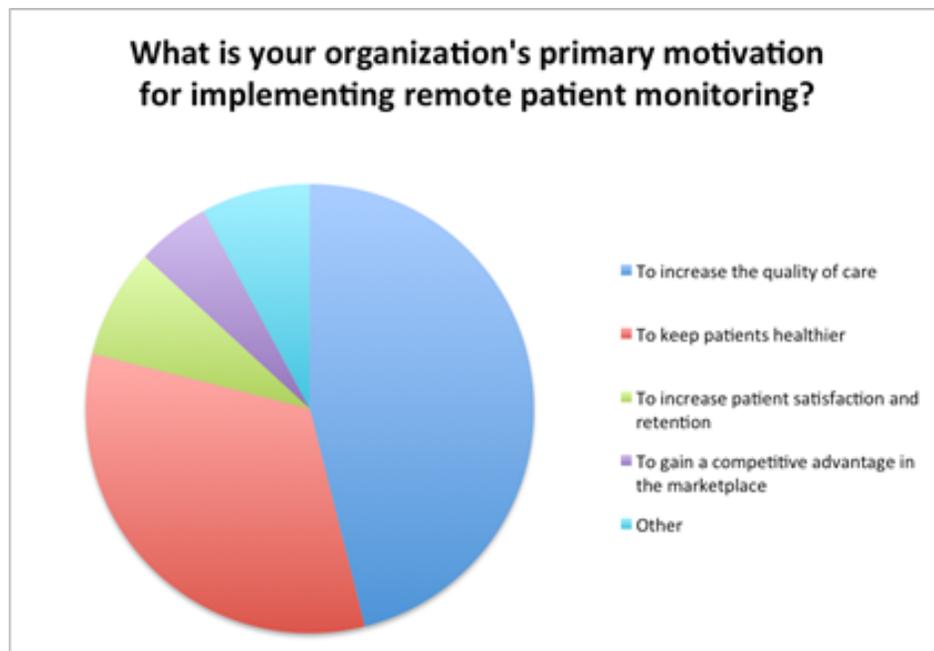
Methodology

An electronic survey was distributed in July 2015 to C-level executives at leading hospitals and health systems across the United States. The survey asked respondents various questions regarding telehealth and remote patient monitoring in their organizations.

135 surveys were completed. Respondents were made up of C-level executives, Presidents, and senior-level management. Responses came from 121 different hospitals throughout over 25 states.

Detailed Findings

As highlighted in the graph below, there are many reasons to implement a remote patient monitoring strategy. But they all boil down to one overarching goal -- keeping patients out of the hospital. Transitioning care to the least acute settings possible, whether that is home health, outpatient facilities, or rehab centers, reduces the overhead costs of inpatient care. Telehealth and remote monitoring are an integral part of collecting the data and information necessary to achieve this goal.

What is your organization's primary motivation for implementing remote patient monitoring?

- To increase the quality of care
- To keep patients healthier
- To increase patient satisfaction and retention
- To gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace
- Other

Decreasing Costs

Decreasing costs and saving money is one of the main drivers behind telehealth and remote monitoring. This can mean growing your business, increasing value for higher patient retention, or investing in large-scale technology projects. Based on survey data, a majority of healthcare leaders see telehealth as a strategic plan for growth in their organizations.

Telehealth: a technology iniative or a strategic plan for growth?
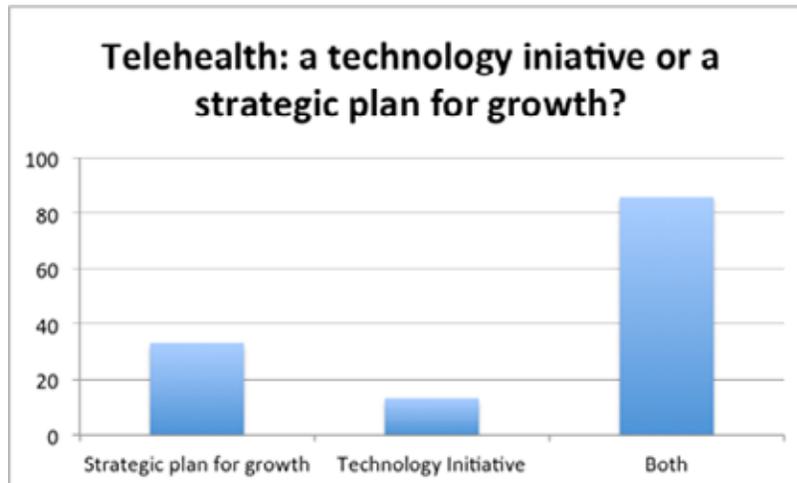
While 88% of executives say that telehealth is a strategic plan for growth, they are quick to acknowledge the competing priorities and obstacles to completing this type of strategy. These obstacles include:

Obstacles standing in the way of remote monitoring strategies:
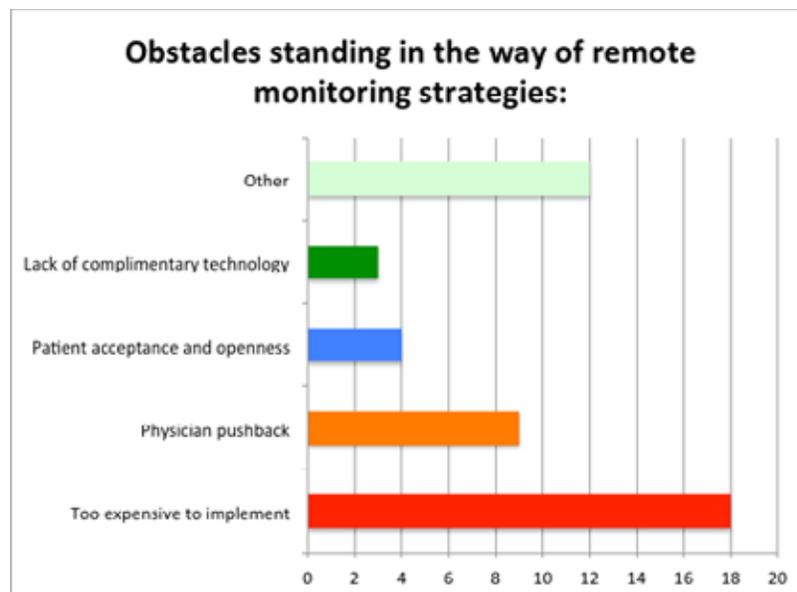
Of the respondents that answered "Other," some of the possible reasons were:

- •No clear guidelines on reimbursements for telehealth

- •Too many competing IT projects

- •We need to focus on operational processes first

So, while it is clear that health systems understand they need to implement telehealth as a strategic initiative, many are only using in limited or isolated applications, suggesting that they have not yet begun to deploy telehealth as a full-scale, enterprise-wide strategic initiative. But the new technologies arriving in healthcare, including CRM solutions, will make telehealth an inevitable part of the healthcare continuum.

Mitigating Risk

In response to the question "What is your organization's primary motivation for implementing remote patient monitoring?" one respondent answered 'Other' with "Telehealth also represents a significant opportunity to reduce cost as we take on more risk."

This answer goes back to the previously mentioned drivers of change, with value-based reimbursements at the top of the list. As healthcare becomes more population based, hospitals and health systems are responsible for getting people out of the hospital and keeping them there.

Risk can also refer to:

- Health preservation and preventative care

- Data and analytics

- Disease-state

The data available from telehealth and remote monitoring systems can be used as a system-wide benchmark for change. Survey results indicate that while 85% of respondents measure readmittance statistics for acute cases, only 68% say that their organization's leadership team is concerned with receiving analytics and insight from a disease-state standpoint. In order to fully reap the benefits of a telehealth solution, all departments of an organization must be aware of the data coming in and what that means for the patient population.

Conclusion

It is a telling sign that 66% of respondents do not know for a fact that every stakeholder has access to the information and metrics needed to provide value-based services to providers and patients. Organizations know they need to change in order to adhere with new regulations and guidelines, but are left wondering where to start.

Telehealth and remote monitoring are two growing examples of data collection and technological advances in the healthcare space. But the advantage that this data can provide is lost unless it is accessible to key stakeholders where they need it and when they need it. Utilizing telehealth and remote monitoring solutions in conjunction with CRM solutions and other systems of communication enable this data to be seamlessly shared with anyone who needs it.

About the Author

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