

Population Health NEWS

How COVID-19 has Changed Home Health Care and Where it is Going

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Why Home Healthcare is Important

Before COVID-19, we had a delivery system that overvalued in-person care via a heavily weighted Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., brick-and-mortar model. In the early days of COVID-19, that model put many people with medical conditions at high risk for contracting the severe COVID-19 disease. While COVID-19 temporarily shut down outpatient services, the need for other ways to safely reach and care for people became critical.

How COVID-19 Changed Home Healthcare

While home healthcare has always been an important part of the care delivery system, COVID-19 pushed it into the limelight. Home is where health behaviors begin and end their day. It is where you can see the root causes of health outcomes and social drivers – is there enough food to eat, what support systems are in place (or lack thereof), do they live alone or in a multi-generational home, are they ‘really’ taking their medications, are they taking 17 medications per day, does their housing match their functional needs to age in place – and so much more.

COVID-19 has changed the healthcare industry as we knew it. It has pushed us to emulate what ALL other markets do so well: have a maniacal focus on meeting the needs and wants of the consumers they serve, or want the opportunity to serve. Healthcare, however, did not bravely take that leap into consumer centricity – COVID-19 unapologetically and appropriately pushed us.

Technology’s Important Role in the Home

The challenge for healthcare organizations is how to gather the above information and provide personal outreach, at scale. An effective way to achieve this is leveraging artificial (or I prefer, ‘augmented’) intelligence (AI), machine learning and telehealth capabilities where care is always on – not just during business hours.

AI and predictive models can inform us about and provide decision support for who needs hands-on care, who is trending toward an emergency room visit, who hasn’t filled a medication for the last month or two, who is receptive to a telehealth visit, who is not tightly managing their blood sugars or blood pressure to assuage downstream complications, and so on.

Clinicians, home health agencies and health plans can now incorporate predictive analytics and streaming data capabilities into their services. They are aptly capable of inserting signals into the onslaught of incoming data to alert care teams when in-the-moment support and management are needed and dispatched and, just as importantly, when care will be needed (i.e., planned visits).

The future and power of digital health care is that it’s designed and poised to wrap health around people upstream. In addition, we have real-time, streaming information about a person’s social risks and health status in the moment. This allows providers to offer telehealth for patients who are not able to, or would prefer not to, come in person to log their blood pressures, sugars and weights.

A 2019 [study](#) found that telehealth is patients’ preferred approach when compared to a traditional in-office doctor’s visit, and demand for telehealth is expected to [soar](#) by 64% in the U.S. in 2020 as people turn to at-home care during the pandemic. More and more people are looking for care at home where they live, sleep, work, pray and play.

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The Future of Home Healthcare

Facility-based care models do not always cater to consumer needs, preference or convenience. This should encourage providers to expand their services to reach patients in their homes and via digital front doors. COVID-19 mobilized care into a lower-cost setting that people, frankly, like and that remains highly efficacious. Because we can connect people with health technology and combine that with human touch in their homes, we will re-design and revolutionize the way we deliver care and consumers expect it.

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Prior to COVID-19, telehealth, AI and home visits were not prominent in the house of medicine. However, COVID-19 has taught us that now is the time to not only invest in care in the home alongside telehealth capabilities, but to invite them in and give them a prominent seat at the table.

Because home is where our health is.