

## Trends in Telepsychiatry

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*Telepsychiatry is transforming the way mental health care is delivered. It is breaking barriers to access to care, and connecting psychiatric providers with patients. Here are some exciting trends we see developing in telepsychiatry.*

### **Telehealth Will Become the Standard of Care**

“Telehealth has moved into the mainstream. In 2013, 52 percent of hospitals utilized telehealth, and another 10 percent were beginning the process of implementing telehealth services” - American Hospital Association. According to IHS Technology the number of patients using telemedicine will grow from 350,000 users in 2013 to 7 million in 2018, and a significant portion of those users will use it for telepsychiatry visits. With a nationwide shortage of psychiatrists, telepsychiatry is being used across the nation in ERs, outpatient clinics, inpatient psychiatry units, consultations on medical floors, prisons, and universities. All major health organizations, including American Psychiatric Association, American Hospital Association, American Medical Association, and World Health Organization have endorsed the value and benefits of telemedicine and telepsychiatry. It is become the standard of practice for hospitals and other healthcare organizations to offer services through telemedicine that they cannot provide onsite.

### **Majority of Organizations Will Realize that Telehealth Offers the Best Value Proposition**

Telehealth helps achieve the triple aim by improving the patient experience, improving population health, and reducing cost of healthcare. Telepsychiatry reduces per capita healthcare costs by freeing up more ED beds, reducing inappropriate hospitalizations, increasing access to outpatient providers, reducing visits to ED and urgent care, reducing transportation costs for patients and hospitals. It increases patient loyalty and lead to new patient capture as a result of the organization adding a crucial service line. In a 2014 Foley Telemedicine Survey, 90 percent of healthcare executives said their organizations have implemented or are developing a telemedicine program.

## **Telehealth Reimbursement Will Continue to Improve**

Over the past four years the number of states with telemedicine parity laws – that require private insurers to cover telemedicine-provided services comparable to that of in-person – has doubled. Currently 31 states and DC have private payer parity laws and 20 states and DC with Medicaid parity laws. With a number of additional states considering similar laws, expect parity to gain traction in 2017. Moreover, 48 state Medicaid agencies have some type of coverage for telemedicine provided-services. There is still considerable room for improvement. There are still a number of states that have not yet mandated insurance coverage for facility-based telepsychiatry programs that reimburse at the same rates as in-person encounters. We anticipate improvements in this via legislation. More than 150 telehealth-related bills were introduced in the 2016 legislative session.

## **Many Patients Will Prefer Telehealth Visits**

Patients enjoy the cost savings, convenience, increased access, reduced wait times to see a provider, continuity of care, and simplicity of telepsychiatry. In a major 2015 patient satisfaction study 95% of the patients said that they were comfortable with telepsychiatry, 84% found the sessions as beneficial as face-to-face, and 99% of the patients reported that they would use the service again. The VA's first large-scale assessment of telemental health services for 100,000+ consumers found telepsychiatry to be more effective and preferable to in-person care. Consumers' hospitalization utilization decreased by an average of approximately 25%. Multiple other studies show that patient satisfaction is similar for telepsychiatry visits compared to face-to-face visits.

## **Licensing Will Be Easier for Telehealth Providers**

One of the challenges with telepsychiatry has been that a provider must be licensed in the state where the consumer is physically located. Until now getting additional licensure in new states took many months and was a painstaking process. Recently, the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) drafted a compact that makes the licensing process much shorter and easier for telemedicine providers. To date 22 states have adopted the streamlined [Interstate Medical Licensure Compact](#).

## Expansion of Direct-to-Consumer Telehealth

Healthcare is in an is going through an exciting shift to an Uber-type model of care. People are seeking convenience, choice, and transparency in their healthcare. They want to be able to shop providers, book appointments on the go, track and view their own health data. As such, there has been an expansion of direct-to-consumer models of care in behavioral health and beyond. We anticipate this model will continue to grow in popularity and that individuals will continue to demand more convenient, accessible forms of care. In response to this movement, [In Touch Physicians](#) is growing our network of providers to accommodate this anticipated demand.

## Clinical Practice Guidelines and Best Practices Will Be Refined

Organizations like the American Psychiatric Association and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists have released guidelines for telepsychiatry standards of practice. Standards from nationally recognized organizations like these help telemedicine to become more universally accepted. These guidelines will continue to be refined as more and more clinical studies are done on telepsychiatry.

## More Settings Will Utilize Telepsychiatry

More people are seeing the value of telepsychiatry beyond just clinics. The technology as it is now means that telepsychiatry can truly be accessed from anywhere. This includes inpatient psychiatry units, specialist consultations, universities, skilled nursing facilities, correctional facilities and more. Telepsychiatry is being utilized in these settings currently, but we anticipate seeing an accelerated growth in the number of facilities using telepsychiatry.

## About the Author



Trilok Shah, M.D. is the founder and Medical Director of In Touch Physicians. He is a psychiatrist with years of clinical and operation experience in telepsychiatry. Dr. Shah has done over 8,000 telepsychiatry evaluations. He has implemented telepsychiatry programs for hospitals, community mental health centers, correctional facilities, and universities. Dr. Shah has been an ambassador for telepsychiatry and educates the medical community regarding the benefits of telepsychiatry through various forums as a panelist and presenter.