

# The Rehab Therapist's Guide to Practicing Telehealth

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**Sometimes, successfully creating and executing an exceptional telehealth program might feel like a herculean effort.** But even though implementing telehealth takes time and forethought, it's not as complicated as you might think, and many practices across the country have successfully adopted it into their repertoire of services. In short, you can do it! We want to empower you to take advantage of telehealth and help you make a seamless transition from in-person to remote visits. This guide will provide checklists to help you focus on your patients and resources to help you get up and running with providing telehealth services in no time.

# Ramping up Telehealth Operations in Your Practice

## Review rules and regulations.

Before you kick off the telehealth implementation process, you **must** review your state practice act and check in with your state licensing board to confirm that telehealth falls under your scope of practice—whether you are a PT, OT, SLP, PTA, or COTA. Keep in mind that while many states have relaxed their telehealth restrictions, many of these relaxations are temporary, and it's your responsibility to know if or when these loosened regulations expire.

Additionally, please understand that payer rules are constantly changing—sometimes on a day-to-day basis. CMS and many commercial payers are currently paying for telerehab services, but that may not always be the case. Check in with your payers to ensure you're adhering to their latest requirements.

## Make sure your liability insurance covers telehealth.

After you confirm that your state allows you to administer telehealth, you need to ensure that your insurance policy—including its malpractice, cyber liability, and general liability provisions—covers telehealth services, as remote care isn't always included in those policies. If it doesn't, then you may need to ask for a rider in order to practice safely, as telehealth liability concerns may include issues such as medical malpractice, lack of informed consent, and privacy or security breaches. Additionally, it's important that you confirm employees are covered under the company malpractice insurance policy. If necessary, you can purchase additional malpractice insurance that covers telehealth liability through carriers such as [HPSO](#).

## Decide which virtual services you'd like to provide.

There are several different types of virtual services: true telehealth, e-visits, virtual check-ins, and telephone visits. In order to make an informed decision about the type(s) of remote services you want to provide to your patients, you must consider a variety of factors.

### Assess your patient population.

Provide services that make sense for your patients—regardless of what everyone else is doing. Telephone service visits might make sense for a provider who serves a technology-averse patient population, while a cash-based clinic might want to forgo e-visits and virtual check-ins and exclusively provide one-on-one, live telehealth visits. In other words, it would behoove you to sit down, consider your patient population, and draw up a game plan that best addresses your patients' needs and your clinic's capabilities.

### Review your payer mix.

Prior to the pandemic, many payers did not cover telehealth services delivered by rehab therapists—but that's all changed. Many insurers—including some national payers—now cover telehealth, e-visits, virtual check-ins, and telephone visits (or some combination of these services) that are provided by a PT, OT, or SLP. It's up to you to contact your in-network payers and determine which services they cover, as it'll affect which services you choose to provide. Finally, keep in mind that standard telehealth (e.g., providing gait training through a live video stream) typically pays better than the more consultative e-visits, virtual check-ins, and telephone visits.

If you prefer not to mess around with payers, offering cash-pay telehealth services might be the right choice for your clinic. (Note: Before providing cash-pay services, check your payer contracts and ensure that you're not violating the fine print.) When creating your pricing structure, you can lean one of two ways:

1. You can use the same pricing you currently use for in-clinic services (because you're still providing the same caliber of care and medical expertise to your patients); or
2. You can discount your telehealth services (because remote appointments typically run a little shorter than standard appointments, and you aren't incurring the same costs you would when providing in-clinic services).

Please note that on April 30, 2020, Medicare declared that it would begin covering telehealth services that are administered by rehab therapists, so you can no longer provide cash-pay telehealth to Medicare patients. You must instead submit claims for those services to Medicare.

## Consider providing wellness services.

Now that patients can easily seek care from any telehealth-enabled clinic in their state, differentiation has never been more important. One way you can differentiate your clinic is by supplementing your telehealth and virtual check-ins with wellness services that meet patients' pandemic-driven needs.

People who have lost their day jobs or school schedule might feel cooped up—and thus, might crave structured activity (like a high-intensity mat pilates class). Workers who are spending a lot of time on their feet might crave a meditative, low-intensity way to soothe their aches and pains (like a yoga or guided stretching class). And the workers—or students—who are stuck behind a computer for eight-plus hours each day could probably benefit from posture work or exercises to reduce neck and back strain.

Providing remote wellness services for young children is another beast entirely—but it's not impossible. An interactive, parent-assisted craft class could help children learn fine motor skills. Speech therapists could tap into the remote wellness market, too—perhaps by holding a public speaking class to help attendees refine their speech and conquer nerves.

In other words, take some time to review your patient population, and draw up a game plan that best addresses your patients' needs and your clinic's capabilities.

## Pick a platform.

Once you know which services you're going to provide—and you have your liability coverage squared away—it's time to pick a platform that will meet all of your requirements. If you're going to provide e-visits or virtual check-ins, then you need a secure patient portal (like [WebPT HEP](#)). If you're going to provide standard telehealth, however, then you need to pick a software that is:

- HIPAA-compliant,
- able to enter a business associate agreement (BAA) with your clinic, and
- capable of passing a comprehensive risk assessment.

You'd normally have to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment before picking a telehealth software. But, under the current circumstances, the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is giving providers a little bit of wiggle room. As of March 17, for the duration of the nationwide public COVID-19 health emergency, the OCR is exercising enforcement discretion for healthcare professionals who provide "good faith" telehealth services to patients through everyday communication technologies. In other words, you won't have to conduct an entire, thorough comprehensive risk assessment when equipping yourself for telehealth during this crisis, which makes it a little bit easier to get your teleservices off the ground.

If you decide to use a non-HIPAA compliant platform, you'll need to get permission from the patient prior to the telehealth appointment. You must document how long their PHI was potentially compromised, why you chose to use a non-HIPAA-compliant platform (it can ONLY be for extenuating circumstances), and then cite the OCR regulation relaxation. Keep in mind that a consumer-facing platform might fit the bill at this time, but patient privacy should still be a priority—even if it's not your first or second priority right now. And when you have an opportunity to vet your platforms through a comprehensive risk assessment, we recommend doing so.

It's important to note that while the federal government has temporarily relaxed its HIPAA requirements, those rules will eventually return to normal. So, if you want to continue providing telehealth services after the COVID-19 pandemic, then it's in your best interest to find—and sign a BAA with—a HIPAA-compliant software. Some vendors might even take care of the BAA for you; [WebPT's new Virtual Visits tool](#), for instance, comes with a BAA. That means our Members are totally covered—even post-pandemic.

## Set it up.

At this point, it's time to cement your telehealth service specs. Many telehealth programs are relatively easy to install (Zoom for Healthcare which powers [WebPT Virtual Visits](#), for example, requires only one click). The brunt of the work in this step involves perfecting your telehealth setup. Not only do you have to find a quiet, clean, professional, spacious, and well-lit area to administer telehealth, but you also must ensure that your camera, microphone, and Internet can support your telehealth demands.

## Recognize if you need equipment upgrades.

If your Internet is compromising the quality of your video, then your patients are due for a frustrating (and off-putting) telehealth experience. You might be able to troubleshoot your slow network woes by rebooting your router, or limiting streaming and other general Internet use while providers conduct telehealth appointments. Or, providers could potentially bypass the problems that come with slow WiFi by using a device that they can hook directly into the router via ethernet cable. But ultimately, if your internet package isn't up to snuff, you might just need to upgrade. In [a telehealth webinar hosted by Rick Gawenda](#), host Mark Milligan, PT, DPT, recommended investing in an Internet package that gives you at least a 15 Mbps download speed and a 5 Mbps upload speed. When picking an internet package, determine how much use you need to account for (e.g., how many providers need to use it, how many will provide care at the same time), and go from there. You can check out Zoom's bandwidth requirements [here](#) as an example of some typical system requirements.

Your internet connection isn't the only equipment you'll need for a successful telehealth appointment. At minimum, you'll want to equip your providers with a device that has an internal microphone—but, if you want slightly better audio, you may want to consider using an external mic. This could be as simple as putting on a pair of earbuds that have a built-in mic or investing in a low-budget microphone.

## Protect your providers' privacy.

If your therapists are providing telephone visits from home, they'll want to keep their phone number private from patients. You can use a calling service such as Google Voice, which gives you an alternate phone number to use for these interactions. You may also be able to block your phone number through your telephone provider; however, you'll need to let your patients know that you are calling from a blocked number to ensure they answer the call. Alternatively, your company may be able to route office numbers to staff cell phones. That way, a patient could call your office number and be routed to your personal cell phone for the duration of this crisis.

## Protect your patients' privacy.

Providers should deliver services from a private location where their conversation and live stream video cannot be observed. Similarly, we recommend that the patient receive services in a private location. We also recommend password-protecting the devices you use to administer telehealth, in addition to password-protecting your virtual meeting rooms if your telehealth platform has an option to do so.

## Review and update your current processes (and forms).

Now that you've set up your new telehealth platform and associated equipment, it's time to safeguard the patient experience. If you're offering telehealth services for the first time, you must create a whole new set of HIPAA-compliant policies and procedures to ensure a smooth, uniform virtual patient experience. How you handle these items will vary based on your clinic's brand, your software's capabilities, your state laws and regulations, and your payers' telehealth requirements. So, no two clinics will necessarily follow the same telehealth policy or process.

## Establish a telehealth-specific communication and treatment process.

When implementing telehealth services, it's absolutely crucial that you sit down and establish a step-by-step communication process, as your old process will hit some snags in a remote environment (e.g., you can't exactly ask patients to swing by the front desk to pay their copay or schedule their next appointment).

Make sure you're thorough and that you address every step of the patient treatment process. Start by asking yourself questions like:

- What's the easiest way for patients to reach out and request a telehealth appointment—and how do we teach them how to put in a request?
- What's our telehealth appointment cancellation and no-show policy?
- What telehealth intake forms do patients need to fill out—and how do they do this?
- Who collects new patient insurance information—and when and how do they collect it?
- Who collects patient payment information—and when and how do they collect it?
- Who follows up with patients—and how and when do they do it?
- How quickly should we aim to respond to patients (e.g., within one business day)?

Additionally, you'll want to consider questions more specific to the appointment itself, like:

- Where will therapists document that the patient consented to telehealth? (Read more about patient consent forms below.)
- What should a therapist do if the patient refuses telehealth and wants to be seen in person?
- What should a therapist do if a patient suffers a serious injury (e.g., a heart attack) during an appointment? (Some states provide specific guidelines for reacting to an emergency situation, but foundationally, you'll need to have the patient's location prior to engaging so you can call 911 for them. You'll also want an alternate way to contact the patient, in addition to an emergency contact.)
- What should a therapist do if the Internet stops working? (Note: Telehealth may not be appropriate for patients whose sessions are repeatedly disrupted due to technical difficulties.)
- What are the biggest factors that will impact patients' telehealth experience, and how will you train your therapists to address them?



## Avoid recording the session.

According to Veda Collmer, WebPT's Chief Compliance Officer, no payer requires telehealth session recording. Each state has surveillance laws and some may even prohibit therapists from recording the session without informed consent from the patient. Furthermore, recording the session may increase the provider's risk of a HIPAA breach, since it will create additional (and substantial PHI) that must be protected. Providers should not record the session unless the patient asks for a recording or there is a compelling reason to do so. The provider should have written informed consent from the patient before recording any sessions.

## Create a telehealth patient consent form.

According to Veda Collmer, WebPT's Chief Compliance Officer, some states explicitly require providers to obtain patient consent prior to delivering any telehealth, and generally, obtaining consent is always a good idea. So, consider providing your staff with a telehealth script to read to patients when initiating a telehealth intervention program—in addition to a physical form. (A consent form template is located [here](#). Be sure to revise or augment it based on your preferences or applicable state laws.) This script should:

- Explain the risks to privacy and health information security that are unique to this delivery method;
- Emphasize that the patient should feel comfortable with this mode of service delivery before consenting to it; and
- Make clear that the patient can withdraw consent at any time.

Additionally, explain that your platform is HIPAA-compliant (if it is, indeed, HIPAA-compliant) and that the therapist will take every possible measure to protect the patient's privacy. Then, once you've received consent, document informed consent at the beginning of your treatment note.

Consent requirements—including the scope of the requirement or whether the consent form must be physically signed—are established by state law and possibly by individual payers. If the consent is obtained verbally, the provider should document that consent was obtained and describe the scope of the patient's consent. If you're concerned that your non-tech savvy patients will have difficulty providing digital signed consent, a photo of the signed consent form (uploaded into your EMR patient record) should suffice. If the patient is unable to provide consent (e.g., because of age or disability), a legal guardian must provide consent.

**We recommend that providers check all applicable state laws (and payer policies) for requirements specific to their practice.** That said, when obtaining patient consent, the provider must generally explain:

- the telehealth services, including the scope of the services, the type of medical information that will be shared during the visit, and who will have access to it;
- the patient's right to refuse telehealth services at any time;
- the benefits, constraints, and risks associated with telehealth;
- a contingency plan if the equipment fails; and
- whether or not the video or audio session will be recorded.

## Train your staff.

Now that you have your new system and updated processes in place, it's time to train your staff. You need to ensure that your providers understand and feel totally comfortable with the new telehealth process. Are they totally comfortable following these new guidelines? Do they know how to use the telehealth platform? Do they know how to practice proper video etiquette? Does everyone—from the front office staff, to billers, to providers themselves—understand (and can everyone communicate) the value of telehealth?

Some providers may struggle to transition from manual care to remote care, either because they struggle with digital healthcare, or they feel uncomfortable in front of the camera. You may want to give these providers additional instruction or extra time to adjust to telehealth; your providers must be completely comfortable delivering telehealth before they see patients.

We also recommend hosting a few staff training sessions to help providers plan their telehealth visits and get used to your platform.

It's also important to manage your clinician's scheduling expectations. Telehealth appointments often run shorter than traditional appointments—so you must decide how that will affect their schedules. What do you expect of them in between appointments? How much documentation time should you build into the schedule? Also, be sure to build in movement breaks so your providers don't feel trapped behind the computer—especially because they're so used to being on their feet all day.

## Checklist

Feel like you have a better understanding of how to ramp up your clinic to start offering telehealth services? Great! Here's a checklist to make sure you've covered everything before we move on to the next step.

- Make sure your liability insurance covers telehealth.
- Assess your patient population and review your payer mix—then decide which virtual services you'd like to provide.
- Pick a platform.
- Set it up (consider software updates, hardware updates, and privacy protection for providers and patients).
- Review and update your current processes (and forms).
- Train your staff.

# Marketing Your Services

Implementing a whole new telehealth program in your clinic won't do you any good if no one knows about it. That's why it's so critical that you market your new telehealth services. A good first question to ask is: How will we inform patients about these new telehealth services? Here are a few tips to get you started:

## Create foundational educational materials.

Unless you've provided telehealth in the past, your patients are totally, utterly unfamiliar with remote or virtual rehab therapy. Unfamiliar things are scary even during the best of times—and these certainly are not the best of times. Education is a great way to allay that fear—and it will be your best marketing tool.

So, prepare educational materials that explain the benefits of telehealth (e.g., "It's convenient and safe! You'll get one-on-one time with your therapist! Studies show that it's just as effective as in-person therapy!"), and try to tell your patients and referral sources what you'd want to hear if you were in their shoes.

Anticipate questions and concerns—and address them. This might sound like a daunting task, but it's really an exercise in empathy. Consider the things you would want to know if someone asked you to switch from a hands-on, in-person treatment to a virtual service. Using that frame of reference, start by creating a list of questions that you can answer in your marketing materials. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Will telehealth therapy really help me?
- What if using telehealth technology is difficult for me?
- Can I use my phone or tablet for telehealth?
- What if I don't have a webcam?
- Is my home environment well suited for telehealth?
- Will I get to see my therapist—or will I have to work with someone else?
- Does my insurance cover telehealth?
- What's my telehealth copay or coinsurance?
- How long does a telehealth appointment last?
- How do I make an appointment?

It's possible that your patients will ask questions you're not prepared to answer. That's OK! The idea is to create materials and talking points that will help you educate patients to the best of your ability, addressing their common (and sometimes repetitive) concerns so you can reassure them that telehealth isn't scary or hard.

## Reach out to current—and recent—patients.

Announce to your current and recent patients through both phone and email that you're providing care via telehealth if they need or want to continue their care; then, educate the heck out of them.

Use those educational materials you drew up, and talk about:

- your new hours of operation (if they've changed);
- the remote services you provide and why they're beneficial; and
- whether those remote services are covered by your in-network insurance carriers (as well as what your patients' cash-pay cost might be).

Reassure patients that you're still able to help them. Teach them that telehealth is a viable substitute for in-person care (especially on a temporary basis) and that your guidance and expertise are still critical to their ability to heal.

Just be sure to manage your patients' expectations. You can wax on about the benefits of telehealth (and you probably should), but the truth is that, while telehealth is a decent placeholder for in-person visits, it's not a one-to-one substitute—and patients need to be prepared for that change. (They can't look forward to any manual therapy treatment, for example.)

## Keep your referral sources in the know.

Patients aren't the only people who need to know what's going on in your clinic. Once you've educated your patients, get in touch with your referral sources and do the same thing. Chances are, a significant number of your referral sources (e.g., primary care physicians) are still actively providing care, and they need to know that they can still send patients your way. Contact physicians, nurse practitioners, and anyone else who refers patients to your clinic and let them know that you're still available to treat patients—and that your telehealth format makes treatment safe for everyone. Give physicians the same educational run-down that you give your patients, and if possible, supply evidence-based proof that you can still help their patients. Explain how you can help them manage their musculoskeletal patients—emphasizing that you can help free up their time so they can focus on their COVID-19 population.

Once those referrals start pouring in, you'll want to check with the payer and direct access rules and regulations in your state to confirm whether or not physician referrals need to specifically state “telehealth” on the order, or whether a standard order for an eval and treatment will suffice.

If you want to go a step further, offer to give them information about your telehealth services that they can supply directly to their patients. For example, you could make a digital pamphlet explaining why remote therapy works—or post a simple FAQ on your website. Make it easy for your referral sources to turn to you during this crisis.

## Notify the general public.

Finally, be sure to update your public-facing clinic information. Got a website? Put an update (or a link to one) in your site header with all COVID-19 related information. Have any social media accounts? Update your bio—and publish a post stating that you’re still caring for patients through telehealth (and pin it to the top of your feed so you can continue posting without burying the update). Own a [Google My Business](#) listing? Update your clinic’s hours and services, and ensure that your contact information is completely correct. [WebPT Local](#) can help users automate this work.

We’d also recommend adding a page to your clinic website that describes which telehealth or remote care services you offer, how those services are conducted, and how the patient can benefit from these services. If you know that certain in-network insurances are paying for telehealth, be sure to include that information. It’s important to include everything from changes to your business hours and your telehealth availability, to educational content about the benefits of telehealth therapy.

We know this is a lot to communicate, which is why we’ve created the following templates and scripts to make this process easier for you. The goal of these messages is to inform patients about the status of your physical locations—and that you’re providing virtual care. Please read through all of the different sample announcements as each has a different focus, and make the appropriate edits if an announcement doesn’t fit your practice’s protocols.

## Customize email templates—and send emails—to announce your new services.

### Announcement of Virtual Visit Availability

Use this template if your physical location is still open, but you're now providing virtual care options to patients who wish to continue their care at home.

**Subject:** In-Clinic and Virtual Care Services Available at {{facility\_name}}

**Message Body:**

Hi {{first\_name}},

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government has designated physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists as “essential critical infrastructure workers.” In light of this, we’ve chosen to remain open to serve those in our community who need in-person treatment.

However, we also understand the importance of social distancing, which is why we’ve introduced virtual care services for our patients. So, if you prefer to stay at home, we are equipped to manage your care virtually over the phone, via telehealth appointments, or by updating your exercises online.

Please call us at {{phone\_number}} if you want to:

- maintain your progress,
- ask questions about your care plan, or
- discuss changes in your pain levels or overall condition.

We look forward to discussing your care plan!

Sincerely,

The {{facility\_name}} Team

Visit Our Website for More Info

{{facility\_website}}

## Announcement of E-Visit Availability

Use the following template if your physical location is still closed, but you're providing e-visits as an option to patients who wish to continue their course of care.

**Subject:** E-visits now available at {{facility\_name}}!

**Message Body:**

Hi {{first\_name}},

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government has designated physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists as “essential critical infrastructure workers.” In light of this—and in an effort to keep our staff and patients safe—we have chosen to remain available by providing e-visits.

An e-visit is a virtual treatment consultation where you can communicate with your therapist through an online patient portal, like StriveHub (which we use at our practice). During the e-visit, you can ask your therapist questions and get updates to your home exercise program. To access the StriveHub patient portal, go to [portal.strivehub.com](http://portal.strivehub.com) or download the StriveHub app on your iOS or Android device.

Want to learn more—or get started? Please call us at {{phone\_number}}. We'd be happy to discuss your next steps!

Sincerely,

The {{facility\_name}} Team

Visit Our Website for More Info

{{facility\_website}}

## Announcement of Telehealth Availability

Use the following template if your physical location will be closed, but you're providing telehealth as an option to patients who wish to continue their course of care outside the clinic.

**Subject:** Telehealth appointments now available at {{facility\_name}}!

### Message Body:

Hi {{first\_name}},

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government has designated physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists as “essential critical infrastructure workers.” In light of this—and in an effort to keep our staff and patients safe—we have chosen to remain available by providing telehealth appointments.

Telehealth is a form of remote patient care where patients and their healthcare providers communicate through video—allowing patients to continue the recovery process in the comfort and safety of their own homes. Telehealth will allow you to adhere to the CDC's social distancing recommendations while still receiving one-on-one instruction and supervision from your therapist.

### How does it work?

Over a live video chat session, your therapist will:

- discuss your current condition and status;
- review your current exercises;
- watch you demonstrate your exercise performance;
- suggest and/or demonstrate exercise progressions; and
- create a plan for future visits and independent management of your condition.

### What do I need for my appointment?

You'll need:

- a desktop or laptop computer (with Safari, Chrome, or Firefox installed) or a mobile device (Apple or Android),
- the ability to use a microphone and camera on your chosen device, and
- a stable Internet connection.

### Does insurance pay for telehealth?

Many insurance carriers are now authorized to reimburse for this service. However, every insurance company is different, so please check with your carrier for more information. We will bill your telehealth appointment to your insurance company the same way we would bill an in-person appointment.

If you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment, call us at {{phone\_number}}!

Sincerely,

The {{facility\_name}} Team

Visit Our Website for More Info

{{facility\_website}}



## Churned Patient Re-Engagement

Use the following template to inform patients who haven't completed their course of care that you're now offering virtual care solutions.

**Subject:** Finish your therapy virtually!

**Message Body:**

Hi {{first\_name}},

We wanted to let you know that we're thinking of you and that, while it's hard to know when we'll be back to business as usual, you can still count on {{facility\_name}} for your therapy needs. If you have an ache or pain and are in need of immediate assistance, we're now offering a variety of virtual care solutions—depending on what you are looking for and what your insurance will cover.

Please call us at {{phone\_number}} if you want to:

- maintain your progress,
- ask questions about your care plan, or
- discuss changes in your pain levels or overall condition.

We'd be happy to discuss your next steps. If you'd prefer to receive in-patient treatment, we're available for that, too. Visit our website to book an appointment or call us at {{phone\_number}}.

Sincerely,

The {{facility\_name}} Team

## Craft inbound and outbound phone scripts.

### **Inbound: Use if a patient calls to cancel an in-person visit or to inquire if the clinic is open.**

Even with CDC-approved safeguards in place, some patients may not feel comfortable going into the clinic for treatment. If you're still offering in-person visits and a patient calls to cancel, we suggest informing the patient about available telehealth services. Be sure to describe and explain what you're offering, and be prepared to answer questions about insurance and payment. If a patient is ready to schedule, create the appointment and send follow-up communication, including appointment reminders prior to the visit.

### **Outbound: Use when calling existing patients to inform them about virtual visits.**

Front office staff, management staff, and therapists may all make phone calls to inform patients about virtual visits. That said, therapists may yield better appointment booking results since they've already bonded and established rapport with their patients. When calling patients, ask how they're doing and explain that they can continue therapy through a variety of methods—including virtual care. Explain that while some services cannot be offered remotely, many services can (including many of the services they're familiar with). So, if they participate in virtual care, they can continue their previously prescribed treatment plans.

We also recommend asking each therapist to craft his or her own personal message in his or her own voice and tone, and reviewing patients' charts prior to giving them a ring. But no matter who's calling, he or she should:

- Greet the patient;
- Introduce him or herself and the purpose for calling;
- Ask for a patient status update (i.e., how are they doing?);
- Introduce the clinic's telehealth services. Discuss how it works and what services are offered virtually—and be prepared to answer any insurance or payment questions.
- Schedule the visit if they're interested.
- Send follow-up communication, including appointment reminders.

## Announce your services on social media.

So, you've got a Facebook page for your physical therapy practice. Now what? Well, posting great content that grabs your audience's attention (and doing it often) should be a top priority on your social media profiles. In addition to sharing clinic news and major updates, you'll want to post things that keep you and your clinic top of mind—and drive people to follow your page. This [article](#) has some examples of a few creative posts to help inspire you.

Keep in mind that current and prospective patients want to know more than the fact that you're still open. Those who do elect to give telehealth therapy a chance are probably doing so for the first time—so try to give them a rough idea of what it will look like. Dedicate some digital space (whether it's a page on your site or an infographic posted to Facebook) to providing an overview of your remote services (whether you're offering telephone assessments, patient portal consultations, or live video therapy).

## Draft the copy.

Write a sentence or two announcing that virtual services are available. Consider your patient population and craft a message that is meaningful to them. For example, if you work with athletes, focus on how you can help condition them at home. If the majority of your patients are elderly, share how easy it is to use telemedicine and achieve great results. You'll see a greater impact when your messages are targeted toward different demographics.

## Make it visually pleasing.

Try to avoid using light text over light colors; this can make the post difficult to read. Look at examples of ads you've interacted with in the past and consider why they grabbed your attention. You'll want to continue to think of your target audience and what appeals to them.

Adding a graphic or photo can help the post stand out and get more views. You can use any real-life photos from your clinic—though you shouldn't include pictures of patients unless you have a signed photo release form. Alternatively, you could use stock photos; there are a lot of free-use sites out there, but one we recommend is [Unsplash](#).

## Mobilize your patients.

When advertising on social media, you'll want to direct patients to a landing page that provides further information and a form. This will enable you to track who's requesting information, and give you an easy way to follow up with prospective patients. Unsure how to build a landing page? [With WebPT Reach](#), you can build landing pages with lead workflows that help staff convert prospective patients into scheduled appointments.

## Review content before posting—and review it again!

Critically evaluate your ad by putting yourself in prospective patients' shoes, and try to think of any possible negative reactions they could experience. Re-craft the message and continue the process (we suggest having multiple people review the ad) until you're happy with the final draft.

Keep in mind that everyone in the country is in the trenches right now—one way or another—and people have much less patience for what they see as pushy or inconsiderate advertising. So if ever there were a time to be careful with your marketing and sales messaging, this is it. The best way to sidestep this problem is to act from a place of compassion, kindness, and empathy. Think about the ways you can genuinely help your patients and make their lives even the tiniest bit better, and go from there. Be respectful, and when patients indicate they're not interested, know when to stop pressing the issue. We're all going through a rough patch, and you don't want your good intentions to be read as opportunistic.

## Consider boosting the post.

Depending on the size of your online following, you may not get much organic or unpaid traffic to your post. Boosting the post (i.e., paying social networks to promote the post) may yield better results. "By and large, Facebook users are not actively seeking out rehab therapists on Facebook," says Josh Golden, WebPT's Digital Marketing Manager. "That's why it's so important to have a strategy behind your Facebook advertising."

## Track results.

Tracking the success of your posts is important—but it's particularly important if you paid to boost your post. If you've put the time and money into creating something, you want to make sure that it's actually driving results. Try asking yourself about your marketing campaign:

- How many leads or prospective patients were collected during the campaign?
- How many of those prospective patients ended up as a scheduled patient?
- How many visits did they schedule?

Getting the attention of prospective patients is great, but you need to follow your efforts down the marketing funnel (i.e., from getting their attention to scheduling appointments) to understand the bigger picture.

## Checklist

Ready to start marketing your telehealth services to your current and prospective patients? Here's a checklist to make sure you've covered your marketing bases before we move to the next step.

- Create foundational educational materials.
- Reach out to current—and recent patients.
- Keep referral sources in the know.
- Notify the general public.
- Customize email templates—and send emails—to announce your new services.
- Craft inbound and outbound phone scripts
- Announce your services on social media.

# Getting Ready for Appointments

Patients love knowing exactly what they need to do to make sure their entire appointment experience—from scheduling to payment—goes off without a hitch.

## Refine your telehealth experience.

It's also crucial that you dedicate time to training your staff on these new procedures. They're going to have to unlearn and relearn a whole heap of information, so be patient. Plus, telehealth is largely foreign to rehab therapists—so you shouldn't expect your PTs, OTs, or SLPs to be telehealth masters right out of the gate. But if you're looking for that smooth transition into the world of telehealth, we recommend you consider the following:

### Improve your audio.

Whether you're talking with a patient over the phone, recording and sending messages, or communicating via live video conferencing, good audio is the cornerstone of a positive patient telehealth experience. But making audio adjustments on the fly is tough when you can't hear what the patient hears—and a small noise on your end might sound like a blaring, crackly mess on the patient's end.

Luckily, a good audio experience has less to do with equipment, and more to do with having a quiet environment. Start by eliminating as many ambient sound factors as possible: turn off your squeaky overhead fan, and mute your phone notifications. Then, test out your microphone. Ask another therapist from your practice—or even a family member—to hop on a quick call with you to listen to your audio. It also might help you to try running through a few exercises with your test partner so you know how well your mic picks up your voice as you move around the room.

## Find the perfect lighting.

A clear picture is also a major influence on the telehealth experience. Patients need to be able to see you—especially if you’re demonstrating exercises. But, if your lighting isn’t set up the right way, then you could end up looking like a shadowy figure whose movements and facial expressions are tough to discern.

Fixing up your video lighting is simple: Just don’t have a light source directly behind you. This will blow out the camera, making the light source brilliantly bright and your face shadowy and dim. If you rotate around, however, and position the light source directly in front of you, it’ll illuminate your face and body.

If you’re sending video exercises to a patient as part of an e-visit, then you might not have to worry about lighting at all. Some vendors (specifically HEP vendors) provide libraries of high-quality exercise videos that you can send your patients—as well as a secure patient portal you can use to communicate with patients about their exercises.

## Find the perfect camera angle.

Once you’ve found some good lighting conditions to record video or conduct your virtual telehealth session, it’s time to find the perfect position for your camera. Patients need to be able to see your whole face when you talk—and potentially your whole body if you’re demonstrating exercises. While there’s no need to overthink your camera positioning, there are a few things to consider as you set up your video station. Start by running through these to-dos:

- If you’re using a stationary webcam, try to position the camera so it’s at about eye level, and stay one arm’s length away from the camera.
- Give yourself enough space to move around and demonstrate exercises.
- If you’re planning to move your camera around—to show floor exercises, for example—have some stable surfaces handy (e.g., a little table or a stack of books) so you don’t have to hold the camera or set it on the floor.
- Tidy up your backdrop. A messy or busy office space can be distracting!

## Practice.

It can be difficult to predict the things that might go wrong over telehealth—especially if everything is new. So, once you feel confident in your telehealth setup and your staff’s training, try running some tests. Ask your therapists to team up with you or their coworkers (or even their family members) to complete mock telehealth appointments. Be sure they ask their helpful stand-in patients for honest feedback about the experience.

## Prepare patients for their telehealth appointments.

Now that you're ready to administer telehealth, it's time to ensure that your patient is prepared and knows what to expect so you have a productive session.

### Send appointment reminders.

Before the patient's visit, be sure to send them an appointment reminder with a list of the equipment they'll need for a successful session. Including instructions ([like these](#)) may be helpful.

### Reach out to patients who are uncomfortable with technology.

This is particularly important for the first televisit. While scheduling a telehealth appointment, some patients may describe themselves as uncomfortable with technology. These patients may require a little hand-holding, but that's nothing a brief phone call can't fix. This will pay dividends in the future when they can start their first session on time and realize how simple the process is—prompting them to continue with future visits.

### Consider creating an online help article.

Provide a link on your practice's homepage to an easy-to-understand article with tips and tricks for telehealth success. This article might advise patients on things like:

- what type of tablet or computer to use,
- how to set up their telehealth platform (if necessary), and
- how much space they need for exercise.

## Checklist

Now that you're all set up, your providers have adequate training, your processes have been revamped, and you're a marketing master, you're just about ready to start running telehealth visits at your clinic. Here's a checklist to make sure your practice is prepared to run telehealth appointments without a hitch.

- Practice mock-telehealth visits so providers better understand the lighting, audio, and space requirements necessary to provide a superior patient experience.
- Send patient appointment reminders.
- Reach out to technologically-challenged patients.
- Share an article online with tips/tricks for a successful virtual visit.

# Collecting Patient Feedback

After you roll out your telehealth services to patients, your work is not done; you must track how your patients are responding to the program. First impressions mean a lot, so you want to understand if or when anything goes wrong on the patient's end. We are big fans of measuring patient loyalty through [Net Promoter Score® \(NPS®\) tracking](#). NPS surveys offer a great way for you to gauge your patients' telehealth experience. If you're looking for ways to automate feedback, [WebPT Reach](#) can help.

# Billing Telehealth

Because rehab therapy telehealth billing is so new, billing protocols vary drastically from state to state and payer to payer. Providers must check in with their payers to confirm how they should bill different services—from true telehealth and e-visits, to virtual check-ins and telephone visits. Remember that legislation and payer rules are in a constant state of flux—so it would behoove you to check up on your payers' guidelines semi-regularly.

Check out our [Telehealth Billing Quick Guide on the next few pages to learn the high-level ins and outs of billing for each virtual visit type.](#)



# Telehealth Billing Quick Guide for PTs, OTs, and SLPs

## Reminders and Disclaimers

First, remember that billing guidelines for remote care and telehealth services are evolving quickly. The information shown in this chart represents our best interpretation of existing guidelines as of April 30, 2020.

### CMS Guidelines

We are awaiting confirmation on several remote care billing details from CMS—including whether these codes are available to hospitals and whether they require the KX modifier when the patient who is receiving the service has exceeded the therapy threshold.

### Commercial Payer Guidelines

Many commercial payers have extended telehealth billing privileges to PTs, OTs, and SLPs, but the specifics around how to deliver, document, and bill for those services can vary considerably from payer to payer. Thus, it is imperative that you continually check in with your payers to verify that you are billing correctly for any given date of service.

### State Guidelines

Additionally, your state practice act may restrict your ability to deliver telehealth services—even if a payer covers those services. As such, it is also important to know the terms of your state's practice act—and to stay abreast of any changes in light of the COVID-19 response.

### Denials

Because rules are changing so quickly, claims processors and Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) are having trouble keeping up. Thus, you may receive denials when billing these services—even if you have billed them correctly. We recommend appealing and following up on any remote care or telehealth claims denials you receive.

### More Information

For more details on each type of remote care visit—as well as patient examples—[check out this blog post](#). This post also defines many of the elements and terms used in this chart. In fact, we'd recommend reading it before you start using the chart.

# Telehealth Billing Quick Guide

## for PTs, OTs, and SLPs

Visit Type	Initiation	Eligible Patients	Service Delivery Format	Technology Requirements	CPT/HCPCS Codes	Place of Service (POS) Code	Modifiers	Payer Coverage
<b>True Telehealth Visits</b>	Not necessarily patient-initiated	Not necessarily for established patients only	Real-time (e.g., synchronous) face-to-face treatment	Live two-way video platform that meets all payer and HIPAA security criteria	Certain 97000 series codes and 92000 series codes (payer dependent)	POS 11 or 12 for Medicare and some commercial payers; POS 02 for other commercial payers	GP, GO, or GN; 95; and KX, if applicable	Covered by Medicare and some commercial payers
<b>E-Visits</b>	Patient-initiated	Established patients only	Assessment and management based on secure messaging and information exchange (e.g., asynchronous)	Approved patient portal	G2061–G2063	POS 11 or 12	GP, GO, or GN; KX, if applicable	Covered by Medicare
<b>Virtual Check-Ins</b>	Patient-initiated	Established patients only	Audio-only real-time telephone interactions (no video calls) and two-way real-time audio interactions supplemented with recorded videos or transmitted resources	Telephone and secure messaging/ email	G2012	POS 11 or 12	GP, GO, or GN; KX, if applicable	Covered by Medicare

# Telehealth Billing Quick Guide

## for PTs, OTs, and SLPs

Visit Type	Initiation	Eligible Patients	Service Delivery Format	Technology Requirements	CPT/HCPCS Codes	Place of Service (POS) Code	Modifiers	Payer Coverage
<b>Remote Evaluations of Images and Recorded Video</b>	Patient-initiated	Established patients only	Store-and-forward image transmission; follow-up via telephone, audio/video communication, secure text messaging, email, or patient portal communication (e.g., both synchronous and asynchronous)	Telephone and secure real-time audio/video, text messaging, email or patient portal	G2010	POS 11 or 12	GP, GO, or GN; KX, if applicable	Covered by Medicare
<b>Telephone Visits</b>	Patient-initiated	Established patients only	Real-time telephone call (e.g., synchronous)	Telephone	98966–98968	POS 11 or 12	GP, GO, or GN; KX, if applicable	Covered by Medicare
<b>Online Digital Evaluation and Management Services</b>	Patient-initiated	Established patients only	Assessment and management based on secure messaging and information exchange (e.g., asynchronous)	HIPAA-compliant, secure platform that allows for digital communication (e.g., patient portal)	98970–98972	POS 11 or 12 (or possibly 02 for certain payers)	Payer-dependent	Not covered by Medicare; covered by some commercial payers

## Final Note

These are challenging times, and pivoting from an in-person practice to a hybrid or completely remote model will certainly have its hurdles. But, with the help of this guide, you and your staff can successfully roll out a new telehealth program. Doing so will not only help our patients and demonstrate our value as providers, but may very well change our industry for the better.

**Now, more than ever,** we're all in this together.

# About WebPT

With more than 90,000 Members and 17,000 clinics, WebPT is the leading software platform for outpatient physical, occupational, and speech therapists. Simple and affordable, WebPT makes it easy for therapy professionals to transition from paper and outdated software to a user-friendly, cloud-based solution. With WebPT, therapists, directors, owners, billers, and front office staff have access to patients' medical records, schedules, and claims anywhere, anytime, from any web-enabled device.

WebPT's therapy-centric design and scalable architecture make it a great fit for clinics of any size, and the web-based application alleviates any large, upfront investments; costly IT support; or bulky, in-office servers. It provides an integrated method to manage patient documents and progress as well as clinic schedules, analytical reports, and billing. WebPT has an intuitive workflow, allowing therapists to efficiently create compliant and consistent documentation.

In addition to documentation, WebPT offers the tools necessary to run an organized clinic, including a multiuser scheduler with appointment reminders, the ability to upload external patient documents, and telehealth capabilities. With WebPT Analytics, therapists and staff can track productivity, cancellations, and no-shows as well as referrals. Therapists can also benchmark and track patient progress through WebPT's outcomes tracking product and obtain continuing education units entirely online through WebPT CEU. Additionally, WebPT empowers practices to gain and retain patients through our powerful patient marketing software and improve patient compliance with our interactive, mobile-friendly home exercise program (HEP). Lastly, WebPT's billing options—including the WebPT RCM Service and Billing Software as well as integrations with several certified billing partners—ensure clinics receive reliable, accurate claims submission and processing as well as speedy, maximized reimbursements.

With WebPT, rehab therapists have a modern and intuitive end-to-end software platform that's well-suited to their needs, empowering them to be better in business—and more importantly, enabling them to provide better patient care.

Headquartered in the historic Warehouse District in downtown Phoenix, WebPT has a 99.9% uptime rate and a 99% customer retention rate. It was named to the Inc. 5000 list of the nation's fastest-growing companies seven years in a row and to the Deloitte Fast 500 list in 2016.

**See why thousands of rehab therapists choose WebPT over any other software solution in the industry.**

**[Check out WebPT.](#)**