

How to Run a Digital Health Practice





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Finally the digital health revolution is here and it's time to learn how to stay ahead of the changing face of healthcare globally. Connected Health is relatively new and innovations are happening but uptake is the issue for most Digital Health practices.

If you are looking to start a cloud-based clinic or simply add an online component to your health practice, then this paper outlines some of the necessary elements as well as ways to overcome challenges that may be faced in setup stage.

Introduction

Consumer expectations are changing in all aspects of life - digital citizens demand increased engagement and better service experiences online.

This also applies to healthcare - we have to accept that Google searches for symptoms and illnesses, health apps on mobile phones and health tracking devices are here to stay. Patients are taking charge of their health and collecting more data and information, more easily than ever before.

The US is expecting a huge increase in video consultations over the next five years, analytics firm IHS purports this will be an estimated 5.4 million video consultations in 2020 as compared to 2 million this year*. It not only gives a very time efficient way to get an answer for the patient but it also helps to increase the patient compliance to treatment protocols.

As patients change their perspective on health and expectations on service delivery, healthcare providers are forced to reinvent the way they offer their advice and provide ongoing care to work with patients in transforming their habits and lives.

According to the [American Medical Association and Wellness Council of America \(2015\)](#)[#], almost 75% of health consultations can be done online, this number is already up from 40% in 2010 ([Mayo Clinic](#))^{\$}.

* <http://www.forbes.com/sites/brucejapsen/2015/08/09/as-telehealth-booms-doctor-video-consults-to-double-by-2020/#543c4bab5d66>

<http://www.poweredbyc2.com/2015/06/11/is-telehealth-becoming-the-new-norm-in-patient-care/2015>

\$ <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2013/sep/17/online-consultation-save-doctors-time>

75% of population goes online for health information



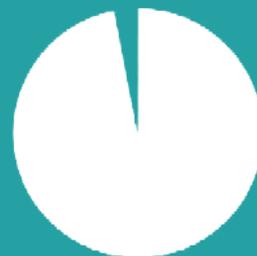
94% using digital health technology are more compliant with treatment



62% using digital health technology are more confident of their own health



97% using digital health technology are satisfied





Improving the communication between the patient and the healthcare provider/s is key to improving patient outcomes. It gives a patient peace of mind to know that:

- 1. Information is shared securely between all their health service providers,**
- 2. Health practitioners can work together to provide the best advice and health plans.**

Through digital and online technology, patients also have flexibility to engage the services they require as they need without being hindered by distance or time.

It is also important to note that despite the surge in health apps usage, there is still a high drop-off rate usually due to compliance or commitment levels. It is proven that having face-to-face contact with a health coach or practitioner increases the probability of the patient staying compliant to their health goals or treatment plan. This is where applications can use video consultations and sharing of information to engage with the patient as often as is necessary to achieve desired outcomes.

Elements of a Digital Practice



Elements of a Digital Practice

There are a few pieces to the Digital Health Practice puzzle.

Practice Management Software

Online Bookings

Practice Website

Video Consultation

Patient Messaging

Mobile Practice App

At the crux of a modern digital practice or cloud-based clinic are Web applications.

Healthcare software is changing to become cloud-based because of the many advantages of cloud-based applications:

- ✓ **Data is stored and backed up on professionally managed systems**
- ✓ **Information is accessible from any device, not just in the practice**
- ✓ **Software is updated continuously - no downtime for upgrades**
- ✓ **No capital expenditure required**

Elements of a Digital Practice

Using a traditional video conferencing solution can be cumbersome, often requiring the practitioner and patient to download the software, as well as limitations on sharing imaging or medical documents. To truly experience the benefits of Connected Health it is imperative to have a flexible system that can give you at least the following:



Integration with your appointment calendar - the more seamless and simple, the better



Ability for multi-user calls to support modern dual-care or team care arrangements



Richer interfaces (than a standard conferencing setup such as Skype)



Live-sharing of medical documents and images



Ability to use other functionality inside the platform e.g. payment gateways or digital Medicare charging or digital prescriptions



Access via a web browser so your patients can join from a simple Web URL



Secure storage and sharing of sensitive patient information



User-friendly design and interface so patients can easily use it as well



Case Study HealthKit

HealthKit is a practice management software that provides services to both patients as well as practitioners. The missing piece for them was a video consultation solution to connect these two parts of their software.

They originally looked at integrating a system back in 2010. They found the system they used had a very rudimentary interface and did not look very sophisticated, not meeting practitioners expectations for highly involved patient interactions. Sometimes if internet reception was poor the video could look fuzzy. Overall it did not add to the value their platform offered.

HealthKit decided to use the Coviu For Health API. The video was high quality even with low quality internet connections and provided other features such as file sharing within the application, as well as the ability to draw directly on documents whilst in a consultation.

HealthKit is now able to connect its more remote and rural-based patients to practitioners with ease and flexibility, as well as offering them a customised interface that supports their brand. They look forward to new features that will be coming to the API such as the ability to record video.





Video Consultations In Different Types Of Practices

Have you been considering adding video consultations to your practice but don't know where to start? You might want to consider:

- What benefits it could give your practice, your practitioners, and your patients
- How you can include it in your workflow
- How you can get paid for video consultations

The answers to these questions will depend on what kind of practitioner you are or what area of healthcare you are in.

Let's look at the following four areas more closely.

A. Allied Health/Online Therapy

In 2014 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimated Allied Health professionals e.g. psychologists, psychiatrists, exercise physiologists, dieticians, speech pathologists, audiologists etc. made up 25% of the health workforce and the number is rising. As a result there is an increased demand for rural-based practitioners as well as overseas opportunities, and the fact is that without adding a digital element to a practice, these needs cannot always be serviced.

Online video consultations have been around since 2011 and support the requirements that Allied Health professionals have to liaise with other health professionals about a patient, or to reduce the travel time for patient or practitioner. It may also make it easier to create prominent sources of income for these professionals, such as referrals from GPs and to work as part of a care team.

Typical Patient And Practitioner Needs That Can Be Offered Via Video Consultations

The opportunities to create trust in the patient-practitioner relationship are multi-faceted:

- Introductory meeting to establish rapport and trust
- Initial assessment requirements (for some professions may need to be in person)
- Regular series of treatments (e.g. 10 session block pre-sold)

Benefits of a Cloud-Clinic for Allied Health Practitioners

- ⊕ **Recurring consultations are supported regardless of location**
- ⊕ **Easy to take credit card payments online**
- ⊕ **Ongoing support for patients to be healthy and well**
- ⊕ **Ability to easily nurture a long-term relationship with patients**

A. Allied Health/Online Therapy

Case study: Chris, APD (Accredited Practising Dietitian)



Chris is a Dietitian in a rural area who had experienced difficulties in his practice regarding travel time, repeat appointment drop-outs and matching the patients' availability with available appointment

times. For example, patients may be travelling over 3 hours each way to attend appointments in Tamworth. Whilst people show commitment to attend 1 hour initial or involved consults, it is challenging to maintain regular 20-40 minute progress consults for review, education and support when these consults may require the best part of a client's day to be taken up.

He had previously tried doing phone consultations but found that the personal touch was lost for his patients. Chris saw the opportunity to expand and enable his practice with video consultations, and break down some of the barriers of time and distance.

He found the CoviU video consultation software allows the sharing of resources on the spot, such as PDF reports, images and whiteboard drawings – all the things he would do face-to-face. Previously he had tried Skype but these were features that are not offered by Skype.

There are so many opportunities for the business now that he can explore further such as:

- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Hiring an external clinical supervisor with the flexibility of them being based anywhere in the country
- ✓ Partnering with external specialists to offer additional services
- ✓ Case conferencing with multiple specialists and patients together, without worrying about trying to get everyone in the same physical office at the same time.

The biggest impact on Chris' business so far has been the increase in patient retention due to the flexibility and ease of his consultations.



B. Specialists

Online video consultations can open up a whole realm of opportunity for this area of health. Patients who don't live in cities could be given more access to better services, as well as diminishing the need to travel to appointments.

Specialists can also receive medicare rebates for video consultations for dual-care with local GPs.

Typical Patient And Practitioner Needs That Can Be Offered Via Video Consultations

The opportunities to create trust in the patient-practitioner relationship are multi-faceted:

- Initial assessment / second opinion (medical imaging, pathology available)
- Providing a second opinion on reports, treatments and/or diagnoses
- Recalls
- Dual care session where the patient sits with the GP and remotely contacts the specialist – this is paid-for by Medicare

Benefits of a Cloud-Clinic for Specialists

 **Ability to easily review online any new pathology/new indicators**

 **Simple to share pathology and imaging relevant to the case**

 **Easy access to widespread multidisciplinary team**

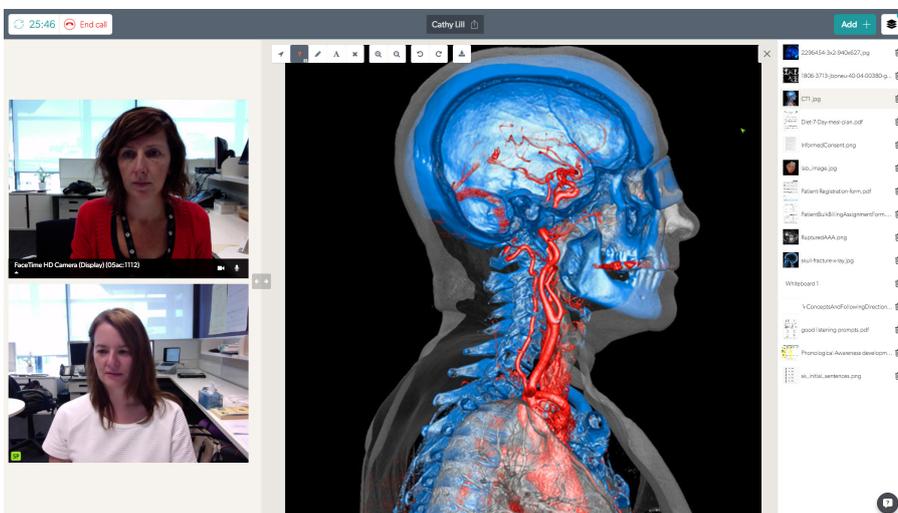
B. Specialists

Case Study: Samantha, Oncologist

Samantha has many patients that have either moved, live in rural areas or are based overseas. Samantha's patients need to get their 6-12 month scans and follow ups but often live far away. Often, patients travel large distances to just be prescribed a drug or physiotherapy.

Once online video consultations were set up, Samantha was able to do the necessary scan analysis via online screensharing and annotations to discuss with patients and their GPs no matter where they were. Samantha is now able to work with GPs in rural areas and be paid for it within the same consultation.

The major benefit for being able to offer this new service to patients is the time reduction for acquiring patients and the associated cost savings. Video consultations have also been a simple and effective solution for working alongside other practitioners or teams.



C. GPs

As people in the workforce become busier it affects their ability to make time for Doctor's appointments including waiting time, it may also increase the potential for no-shows.

The US is leading the way here by making video consultations the first point of call to triage a patient. This then allows many of the minor items to be taken care of easily (e.g. new prescriptions, referrals, sick notes). There is no doubt that the future for GPs consists of having a dual practice of digital and in-person services. GPs will become more involved with dual-care and team care discussions, with and for, their patients. This is best done via a rich and secure video platform because of the need of sharing and discussing medical imaging.

In the future, patients will even be able to purchase medical devices providing the GP with data they need that can replace in-person session where necessary.

Typical Patient And Practitioner Needs That Can Be Offered Via Video Consultations

- Sick notes
- Prescription renewals
- Referrals to pathology
- Co-meeting with specialist in a dual care scenario
- Emergency calls (e.g. parents with a young child out-of-hours)

Benefits of a Cloud-Clinic for Allied Health Practitioners

-  **Time to receive a more holistic assessment**
-  **Reduce wait time on sick notes, renewals and referrals**
-  **Ability to meet online with a complete care team**
-  **Ability to provide flexible services and hours**

C. GPs

Case Study: Elaine, GP

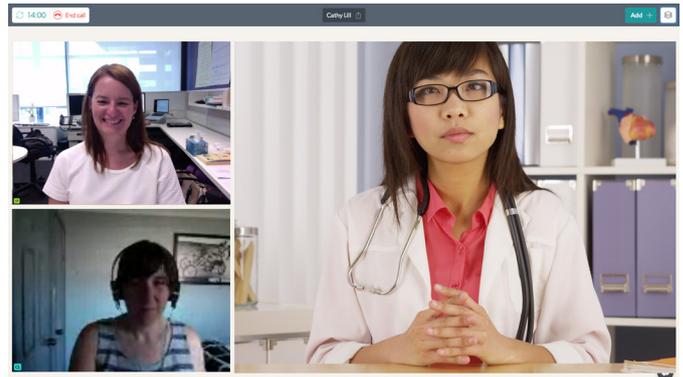
Elaine is a GP who was keen to extend her service to frail patients who were not willing or able to travel.

In the past Elaine has experimented with Skype however, there were security concerns for sharing medical data. Another barrier when trying to set up dual-care session for dealing with specialists was that the specialist did not want to take the time to install custom software in order to do video consultations.

By choosing a web-based video consultation program, Elaine was able to offer:

1. New times: “we now offer emergency video consults out of hours to our patients, e.g. early in the morning when a parent has a sick child and doesn’t know if they can send them to school; we don’t need to have our practice staffed to take such calls”

2. New services: “we can offer video consults to our patients with specialists without having to travel – this gives us more insight into their illness and we can even charge it on Medicare”



For the future, Elaine is planning to offer even more services via video consult such as:

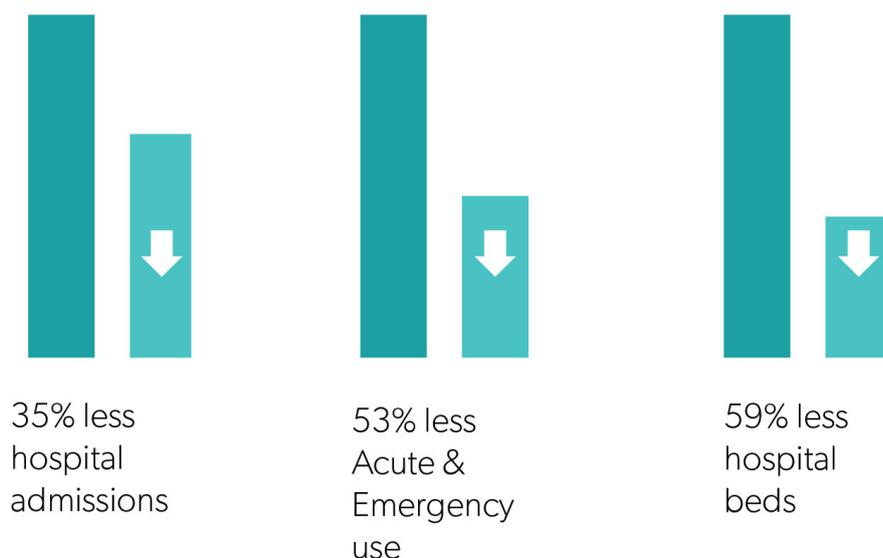
- prescription renewals
- pathology reporting so people don’t have to come into the office to hear their results
- GP services to aged care facilities saving time on visits

The biggest difference immediately has been the ease with which Elaine is now able to communicate to and work alongside specialists and without the previous barriers of complex equipment or installation of software.

D. Beyond Primary Healthcare

- Hospitals:
 - Outpatient patient monitoring & frequent touch points
 - Multi-disciplinary team meetings / case conferences
 - Emergency response
- Healthcare into nursing care homes or aboriginal communities
- Work place insurance case management
- Healthcare services provided by employers
- Emergency support straight into schools
- Health support into correctional facilities
- Health support into shopping centres

Benefits of a Cloud-Clinic for Allied Health Practitioners



<http://www.adjacentgovernment.co.uk/ict/telemedicine-helping-airedale-nhs-trust-combat-healthcare-problems/10652/>

Top Ways Make Money From Your Digital Health Practice

Here are some paths that may assist you to implement video consultations in a functional and profitable way.

1. Medicare payments

Medicare has been engaging in telehealth services for 5 years now and there are three groups of video consultation MBS item numbers for telehealth:

a. The “dual care case” or “collaborative consultation”: A patient is seeing a specialist, consultant physician, or consultant psychiatrists via video consultation.

The patient is with a GP, nurse practitioner, midwife, practice nurse, Aboriginal health worker (AHW) or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island (ATSI) health practitioner in the Telehealth-eligible area more than 15km

away from the specialist-end. They can also be at an Aboriginal medical service or in a residential aged care facility anywhere in Australia.

Both the specialist-end and the patient-end practitioner are eligible for MBS rebate. There are a minimum of 3 items involved:

- the specialist consulting item(s)
- a telehealth item at the specialist-end (derived fee)
- a telehealth item for the clinician at the patient-end

b. Unaccompanied specialist telehealth

services: A patient is seeing a specialist, consultant physician, or consultant psychiatrist via video consultation. The patient is either in a Telehealth-eligible area more than 15km away from the specialist-end, or they are at an Aboriginal medical service or in a residential aged care facility.

The specialist-end is eligible for MBS rebate. If an initial telehealth attendance is charged, there is a set fee. For specialist consultation items, a minimum of 2 items are involved:

- the specialist consulting item(s)
- a telehealth item at the specialist-end (derived fee)

c. Multidisciplinary Case Conferences are also Medicare eligible services that can be held via video.

2. Bundled or Prepaid Service Packages

Digital health gives a number of options for creating new packages or services:

- Combine video consults with in-person consults

- 'Lunchtime' video consults for office workers or those with difficulty travelling
- Special video consults for the elderly or immobile or those in retirement homes
- Prepaid consultations
- Packages with existing services
- Referral consults
- Multidisciplinary care packages

3. Saving expenditure

Having a digital practice that gives you the option of video consultations with a number of supporting applications such as sharing imaging or medical documents and payment gateways, will undoubtedly save on time and practice costs. An [Alliance for Connected Care study*](#) found that telehealth can save up to \$100 compared to traditional in-office visits.

- Less practice opening hours requires less support personnel
- Weekend video consultations offer the flexibility of working from home
- Cut down on hours spent in communication with multi-disciplinary teams or practitioners working with the same patient

* <https://www.healthitoutcomes.com/doc/telehealth-costs-up-to-less-than-office-visits-0001>



4. Targeting a new audience via video consultations

When practitioners are limited by location they also limit their capacity to reach people and digital health is a superior way to overcome this.



Patients from rural areas can be offered new services for example, speech pathology



Patients who have an intermittent need for a specialist service



Overseas medical tourism for example, Asia's growing population

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