

Telemedicine Technology Makes Healthcare More Affordable

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Innovations in medicine and medical technology have advanced significantly in the past 50 years. Unfortunately, so have the costs.

In 1960, the national healthcare spending per person in the United States was \$1,183 when adjusted for inflation, according to the [Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation](#). That was roughly 5.2 percent of U.S. GDP at the time. By 2010, the medical expense per person was \$9,203 when adjusted for inflation—nearly 18 percent of overall GDP.

Medical costs have not gotten better recently, either; branded drug prices have outpaced inflation every year since 2006, for instance, and even generic drugs have gone up in price by an average of 9 percent per year since 2014, according to a recent report put out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers' Health Research Institute, [Top health industry issues of 2016](#). With better medical care has come spiraling medical costs.



That is why [telemedicine technology](#) is one of the big healthcare trends today. Unlike most other healthcare innovation, telemedicine offers the potential for reducing costs by making healthcare more efficient. Mobile real-time communications solutions such as Agora.io and wearable technology like FitBit are part of a battery of telemedicine technologies that have the potential for making healthcare more affordable.

Here are four ways that telemedicine will change healthcare and cut costs in the process.

1. Better Utilize Medical Experts and Expensive Equipment

Medical specialists don't come cheap. The trouble is that healthcare facilities either need to keep these specialists on staff or settle for less. This raises staffing costs, leads to poor diagnoses, and creates inefficiencies in the medical system.

Telehealth tackles this problem by enabling specialists to see patients or consult with doctors remotely, improving speed and quality of care by ensuring that the right expertise is available at the right place at the right time. The combination of medical data in the cloud combined with embedded real-time videoconferencing means that medical specialists can consult with healthcare facilities across the world easily and when needed. At less cost, too.

Medical equipment utilization also can be improved with telemedicine. Using smart device technology, expensive medical equipment such as MRI machines can be maximized better. If an MRI in one location is only 20 percent utilized and one in another location is overloaded, healthcare facilities can automatically reassign patients to use the other scanner during off-peak times.

2. Improve Remote Patient Monitoring

Telemedicine can dramatically boost patient oversight now that reliable remote monitoring is possible thanks to wearable tech like self-reporting glucose monitors. A new world of remote monitoring emerges when data from diagnostic devices can remotely transmit to healthcare workers.

For instance, complete physiological information can be collected by a smart device, sent to the cloud for analysis, then wired to a mental health professional for further review. This replaces the need for regular patient check-ins and instead

delivers a continuous flow of medical information that is less expensive and better than periodic checkups.

3. Increase Medical Intervention and Preventative Care

Stopping a problem before it starts is the best medicine. Patients with chronic but treatable health issues such as diabetes or high blood pressure are far less likely to develop complications if warning signs are detected early. Telemedicine makes preventative care far more likely because data from wearable devices can be transmitted automatically. Doctor consultations then can take place quickly over video or email as soon as issues are spotted.

One example is cardiovascular disease. Patients treated for cardiovascular disease with digitalis medicines, for instance, can be monitored 24 hours a day so there is no intoxication from the drug.

Wearable devices also can keep the healthy safe by monitoring daily activities and delivering a feedback loop. The percentage of consumers using at least one health, fitness or medical app for preventative health tracking shot up from 16 percent in 2013 to 32 percent by 2015, according to PriceWaterhouseCoopers. This keeps people healthier longer and cuts down on healthcare spending by prioritizing preventative care and focusing consumers on good health habits.

4. Proactively Refill Prescriptions

Monitoring prescriptions can be hard, doubly so for seniors and those taking several drugs at once. The need for a refill isn't always spotted immediately, and sometimes getting prescriptions filled in time is hard. This can lead to medical complications and the added costs that entails.

Telemedicine can help doctors and pharmacies stay on top of refill needs, however, alerting them when a patient is running low. They can then initiate an automatic refill or at least a check-in with the patient.

There are many other ways that telemedicine can cut costs while improving healthcare at the same time. New medical technologies may be raising the price of healthcare, but telemedicine technology also can reduce it.