

Easy Access

Physician Practices Increasingly Turn to Telemedicine Services

By JAMES DZIOBEK III and RYAN MARLING

Patients are looking for convenient ways to access healthcare services when they are unable to be physically present for a traditional office exam. Over the past couple of years, some physician practices across the country have started using telemedicine technologies in innovative ways to increase patients' access to services.

A successfully implemented telemedicine service can increase access to care, and may also improve the operational efficiency of the practice and patient experience. Several factors are contributing to the spread of telemedicine, including a greater demand for convenient healthcare, improved technology to facilitate virtual visits, and the need for a focus on care coordination in many emerging payment models. Telemedicine may serve as a mechanism to help bridge the gap between patient demand and managing population health by providing improved access and convenient care.

While many interesting use cases exist, there have been a number of concerns raised about telemedicine. These include reimbursement, identifying appropriate patients for telemedicine visits, the ease of use of the technology, maintaining continuity of care, and concerns about providing care for patients across state lines. If you are thinking about implementing telemedicine in your practice, here are a few key considerations and best practices:

- Target your patient populations. Consider which patients in your practice may be candidates for use of the technology. Consider the clinical and demographic

factors that may make video visits a practical solution.

- Be sure to designate a virtual visit champion. Having a clinical and administrative champion is important in developing your practice's strategy for telemedicine. Champions would strategize and monitor the processes both administratively and clinically to ensure the healthcare needs of participating patients and physicians are met.

- Ensure a smooth virtual visit. Consider what the process and responsible person will be to ensure that requisite logistics are set up and a test run is completed prior to the virtual visit. Make sure that the patient is able to use the technology and that all systems are working properly in advance.

- Determine how virtual visits are incorporated into physician schedules. Will virtual visits be scheduled during a virtual-visit block, or will they be handled at certain points during the day? Advance consideration in this area may help with enhanced efficiencies for both virtual and in-person encounters.

Although it might not be perfect for all patients, telemedicine could help boost patient satisfaction and allow patients to be seen sooner during some routine

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follow-up visits. Telemedicine may also help physicians connect to patients in new ways outside of traditional care settings. ■

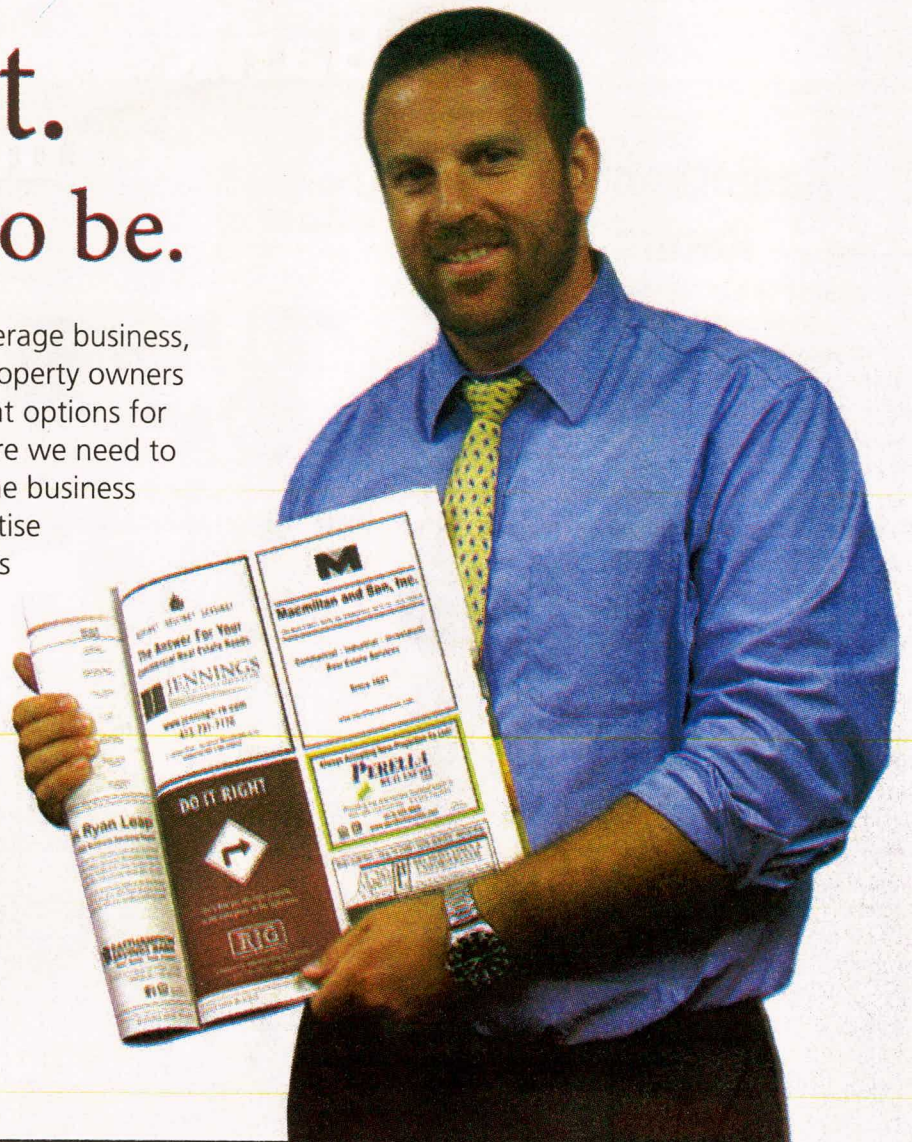
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