

Telehealth Visits Channel Care Directly to Patients at Home



The post-op period can be a delicate time for urology patients. They may be in pain, on medication, and unable to get around easily. To accommodate patients' needs during this sensitive period in their recovery, Yale Urology now offers a telehealth service. These secure, password-protected video visits using a smart phone or computer for communication between a doctor and patient provide a high level of care for post-op appointments but enable patients to remain in the comfort and convenience of their own home or office.

When Yale Urology launched its telehealth service early in 2019, it joined an institution-wide implementation across Yale Medicine to provide patients with easier, faster access to healthcare. "We felt it was very important for us to offer this service to our patients," said Patrick Kenney, MD, Clinical Vice Chair, Department of Urology. Dr. Kenney spearheaded the launch with urologist Marianne Passarelli, MD, the physician lead. "Our goals were to not only address the patient experience, but to be able to provide truly outstanding care in an efficient way that decreases the barriers that can exist between patients and their providers."

Telehealth offers multiple benefits for patients—starting with a tremendous time and cost savings. "We share our patients' concerns about the total cost of care, including missed days from work and travel time," Dr. Kenney said. "We know that our average in-person follow-up visit, which is a 15-minute visit, takes several hours of a patient's day." In contrast, patients can schedule the brief telehealth appointment during their lunch or coffee break and then continue on with their day. A survey of Yale Medicine telehealth patients found that 100 percent of patients saved at least 30 minutes by having a video visit; the majority saved two to three hours.

The convenience of telehealth is especially important during the post-op period. "After surgery, some patients can't drive and there may not be a family

member available to bring them to the office," Dr. Kenney explained. "They might still be having pain that makes riding in a car uncomfortable. The principal aspects of a post-op visit—discussing a pathology report, learning about their symptoms, setting a plan for the future—can just as well be accomplished through a telehealth visit as it can in the office. And since this is a video visit, we can still see the patient, get a sense of their overall well-being, and visually inspect the appearance of their surgical site."

That convenience extends to the scheduling process. Patients can schedule their telehealth visits through their MyChart portal, which they already use for arranging in-office visits and communicating with their care team. "From the physician's perspective, it's relatively seamless," Dr. Kenney said. "It's incorporated within existing workflows. The patient has a defined visit time and we see them just as we would if they were coming to the office."

Dr. Kenney compares the telehealth visits to FaceTime and Skype calls and has found the technology to be easy to use for patients of all ages. "Some people might wonder whether telehealth is better suited for millennials," he said, "but I care for people from a wide range of ages, and there are plenty of retirees and older folks who are very tech savvy and able to reap the benefits of telehealth."

The response to telehealth from patients of Yale Urology and across Yale Medicine has been resoundingly positive. More than 200 video visits have been completed across Yale Medicine. Ninety-six percent of patients surveyed strongly agreed that video visits were easy and quality of care was the same as an in-office visit.

"Telehealth is an important instrument in our tool chest we can use in our commitment to patient-centered care," Dr. Kenney said. "It is changing the paradigm of care, and I'm confident that this is part of the future of medicine."