

## Virtual Health is vital for people with epilepsy

Providers who care for people with epilepsy have long seen the value virtual health could offer and waiting for the chance to use it! The recent availability of virtual visits has showcased some of the expected benefits and highlighted others we wouldn't have predicted. Much of these unforeseen benefits can be translated to other patient populations as well. As you read this testimonial, please think about how these benefits may translate to the patients you care for in your practice!

People with epilepsy often have driving restrictions due to seizures. This makes it harder to sustain employment, education, and complete everyday errands. Insurance may cover medical rides, but often these require extensive advanced scheduling and do not follow a reliable schedule. A 30 min doctor appointment may take them an entire day. They frequently choose between paying for transportation or calling on favors from friends and family; leaving them with fewer resources for trips to the grocery store, work, or just going somewhere fun.

Virtual medicine has helped these **transportation issues** tremendously:

- Epilepsy clinic visit volume increased when we switched to nearly 100% virtual visits, with “no-show” rates dropping by about 50%. Much of this is attributed to eliminating the need for transportation, or not having a transportation plan fail at the last minute.
- Many people with epilepsy have physical or emotional disabilities, making a trip out of the home a big ordeal, resulting in missed appointments. This issue is largely solved by in home visits afforded by virtual medicine.
- When a person has had good seizure control, but for some reason has a breakthrough seizure, the old standard was a phone call to our office in which they were told “OK you have to stop driving again. And when can you come in to see us about this recent seizure?” Virtual visits eliminate this mixed message completely and enable more rapid and responsive care.

There are concerns that virtual health does not offer the same level of care as in-person visits. For epilepsy care virtual visits can **directly improve the care** we provide.

- One of our doctors diagnosed a drug-related allergic rash during a video visit.
- Most people do not remember the details of their seizures. Witness accounts are an invaluable resource in achieving the most accurate diagnosis and best care plan, but family members or long-term care workers are often unable to accompany patients to clinic appointments. Virtual visits make it easy to engage family members and caregivers, giving us valuable access to their observations.
- Following specific and often complex medication regimens is critically important for good seizure management. However, many people cannot remember the complicated names of their seizure medications, or how many of each anti-seizure pill they take. Virtual visits allow the patient to show us their bottles, without having to remember to bring them all into the clinic. They can show us their method for remembering to take the pills, the pillbox they use, and other valuable information that allows us to craft the best plan for proper medication use in their home.
- An unforeseen but highly appreciated benefit of virtual medicine has been reported by patients themselves. When a provider has an unexpected delay in their day, causing them to be late for subsequent appointments, patients with virtual visits have been able to stay in the virtual waiting room and go about their usual home activities. This is much preferable over sitting in a clinic room waiting for the provider.

Epilepsy is a chronic condition that is best managed via a long-term relationship between the provider and patient. Once a person and their provider have navigated the social, cognitive, and personal challenges that come with epilepsy, not to mention all the diagnostic testing, it can be a significant burden to change to a new provider. Virtual visits have enabled us to **extend the range of our care** in wonderful ways.

- When patients leave the state to go to college, virtual visits offer more flexibility, instead of having to cram appointments into their school breaks.
- Patients who move further away can continue to receive care from the provider who knows them best.
- One of our providers described a patient of theirs going on vacation out of state, having a seizure, and being able to do a virtual visit to adjust their care plan, therefore avoiding a trip to the local ED in an unfamiliar healthcare system.
- Another epilepsy neurologist described two separate patients who would have missed their in-person appointments because they felt ill. Both people had their visits converted to virtual visits, during which it became clear they had symptoms suggesting COVID. They were directed by their neurologist to HHC testing facilities, where they tested positive for coronavirus.

As virtual medicine continues to expand, we are excited by the prospect of future developments.

- An essential part of caring for people with epilepsy is screening for associated medical conditions such as depression and anxiety. Virtual health offers methods for delivering these surveys via phone prior to their arrival at the clinic, reducing the duration of the virtual or in-person rooming process.
- There are multiple online platforms designed for people to track their seizures that permit providers to see the records. This long-term data can help identify specific trends and seizure triggers that may improve individual care plans.
- We are developing online educational resources regarding aspects of care for people with epilepsy. In the future we envision being able to “assign” topically relevant videos or educational programs so that patients can prepare ahead of time for specific visits. The virtual platform fosters inclusion of their families or loved ones in these educational opportunities, which can enhance their understanding of their healthcare options.

Providers who care for people with epilepsy are already very pleased with the opportunities virtual health offers our patients, and even more excited about the future of virtual medicine!

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