The Need for Modern Telehealth Solutions in the Wake of COVID-19.

By: McRay Simmons, Zones Advanced Technology Executive, Zones LLC

The COVID-19 pandemic is driving new technological innovations.

In every line of work, organizational leaders are learning that workplace modernization is a necessity. Why? Because the opportunity cost of not investing in it is just too great. If your people don't have the latest and best technology, their everyday work processes will be slow and inefficient, and it's only a matter of time before they become disengaged. Your staff will inevitably suffer as a result.

Perhaps nowhere is that more true than in healthcare. The process of delivering patient care has always been fraught with inefficiencies for both doctors and their patients. The typical visit to a medical facility includes long times spent in waiting rooms, difficulties tracking down the right medical specialists at the right times, and of course, high costs. Individuals on both sides have long had to accept these issues as simply part of the process.

COVID-19 brings unprecedented challenges to providing care

Of course, with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, these issues have only become worse. Due to the staggering number of infections the United States has seen in a short time, many medical facilities have found themselves overworked, understaffed, and stretched to their limits. They haven't had the time or the resources to treat their patients in a timely, cost-effective fashion.

There's no way to tell when we'll be able to return to the way things were before the pandemic hit. It could be months, it could be years, it could even be longer. Because of that, it's not feasible to wait for the virus to simply go away – we need to be proactive and invest time and resources into modernizing our healthcare systems now, so that we can be prepared in the future.

25%

Only 25% of people used telemedicine before the outbreak of COVID-19.

59%

59% of people say they're more likely to use telemedicine today than previously.

33%

33% of people say they would leave a physician who didn't offer telemedicine access.

13%

Healthcare workers make up 13% of the COVID-19 cases in the United States.

Telemedicine is a solution to changing healthcare needs

One great answer to these questions is to adopt telemedicine. Telemedicine has grown in stature, as some medical providers seek innovative ways of caring for patients remotely. Waiting around in clinic hallways and annex rooms is annoying and inefficient – but if you allow physicians to see their patients remotely, you have a much faster process that makes everyone happy. Physicians can get a better handle on their workloads (and keep themselves safer from infection), and patients have an easier time getting medical attention without unnecessarily draining hours from their day.

This approach is growing in popularity this year. In a recent Forbes report,[1] it came to light that only 25% of people had used telemedicine before the COVID-19 pandemic began, but today, 59% say they're more likely to use telemedicine than they were previously. Additionally, 33% say they would leave their physician if they didn't offer telemedicine access and a competitor did. These figures go to show that patients have become keenly aware of the need for greater efficiency in healthcare.

According to Modern Healthcare,[2] many healthcare organizations are keen on caring for patients without endangering their own staff members, and that means implementing new high-tech strategies like telemedicine. According to a study conducted by Gartner,[3] healthcare workers make up 13% of the total COVID-19 cases in the United States. Todd Czartoski, chief medical technology officer at Providence Regional Medical Center in Everett, Washington, said that with the right hardware and software in place, telemedicine is an effective way to keep staff safe.

> *We had people outside the room talking to the patient, evaluating them with the [electronic stethoscope] and keeping those communication lines open,"* Czartoski said. *"The hospitalists, infectious disease doctor, and other specialists didn't have to gown up and go in and out of the room multiple times a day.*

And this isn't just a passing fad, either. A recent report from Forrester predicted that the way we've handled this current pandemic will "forever change the way consumers seek and receive healthcare." This current crisis will lead physicians and patients alike to dramatically shift their focus toward virtual care. And as they do, they'll unlock countless benefits for both patients and providers:

- Patients will find it easier to enroll for healthcare.
- Doctors and nurses will have a much easier time juggling their busy schedules.
- Healthcare costs will be lower.
- The process for receiving medical bills and paying them will be simpler and cleaner.

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Congrats included
$500 million
in telemedicine funding
in the March 2020
aid package.

This change is affecting decision-making everywhere: When the United States government drafted their emergency aid package in March 2020, it included $500 million set aside for telehealth services.

When done right, implementing telemedicine can yield many benefits for your healthcare organization. It should improve the daily experience for everyone – patients will receive better care and staff members will have an easier time doing t heir jobs. On top of that, infrastructure will be secure and HIPAA compliant, and IT operations will be streamlined from top to bottom.

How Zones can help with your telemedicine needs

At Zones, we're proud to say that we can provide such technology. If your healthcare organization is looking to develop virtual care solutions, we can help with that. And we aren't just interested in installing quick fixes – instead, we can optimize your IT infrastructure, offer configuration services, and managed services so it's efficient and secure over the long haul.

We've always emphasized Workplace Modernization, but that's particularly the case in healthcare in 2020 and beyond. Not only are we heavily invested in the telemedicine revolution that's happening today, but we're also excited to be a part of it. We work every day to give healthcare organizations the technology they need to offer more robust and customized telehealth options to allow your organization to provide the best possible patient experience.

About the Author

McRay Simmons is a Healthcare Advanced Technology Executive for Zones, LLC, and is responsible for healthcare accounts in NC, SC, and VA. McRay has 35 years of success and expertise in Healthcare Technology and Services and is recognized by his customers for his integrity, work ethic, and consistently viewing their business through their eyes. As a team member at Zones, LLC, an IT VAR and Systems Integrator, he is happy that these values are shared and supported.

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For over 30 years, Zones has worked with industry-leading partners to offer comprehensive IT solutions to our healthcare clients. Our Workplace Modernization, Network Optimization, Data Center Transformation, Security Fortification, and Global Supply Chain solutions lead clients through their digital transformations, and our services offer support every step of the way. That's what makes us the **First Choice for IT.™**

Corporate Headquarters
Zones, LLC
1102 15th Street SW, Suite 102, Auburn, WA 98001-6524

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