



**Baystate
Health**



How Baystate Health Developed and Implemented a Virtual Follow-Up Care Program

Baystate Health, an integrated healthcare system serving over 800,000 people throughout western New England, partnered with American Well on a telehealth follow-up care service for patients. The health system's virtual follow-up care program aligned nicely with its system-wide priorities of population health and chronic disease management. Here's a look inside Baystate's follow-up care telehealth program.

Problem: Limited availability and long wait times

Baystate Health wanted to ensure existing patients were receiving timely, efficient follow-up care, and needed to find a way to reduce follow-up appointment wait times, which were averaging over two weeks. Additionally, Baystate wanted more in-person availability to accommodate new patients.

Solution: Use telehealth to free up in-person time slots and reduce follow-up wait times

The health system implemented virtual follow-up care to help reduce wait times and free up time slots for needed in-person care. By moving follow-up appointments for certain conditions to telemedicine, the health system hoped to provide more in-person availability for new patients and timelier follow-up care for existing patients. The most common conditions that Baystate used virtual follow-up care for included stable chronic conditions such as diabetes, thyroid problems, and osteoporosis; low acuity conditions such as conjunctivitis and upper respiratory infection; and mental health conditions like depression and anxiety.

Staffing for follow-up telehealth

Baystate staffed its telehealth follow-up program with 25 providers—20 advanced practitioners and five physicians. "What's unique about our program is that these providers also practice in-person care," says Badal Kalamkar, MD,

MPH, medical director of telehealth at Baystate Health. “Our thoughtful combination of in-person and telehealth visits gives providers a way to improve the care they give by tailoring the visit to the need,” says Anna Paskausky, FNP, primary care provider champion at Baystate. “As providers adapt their practice to the virtual environment, we find them able to scale up the proportion of time spent in virtual visits.”

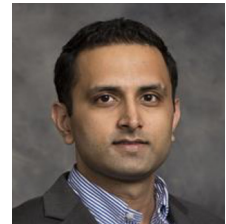
Identifying eligible patients for virtual follow-up

For follow-up telehealth to be successful, Baystate had to effectively communicate its benefits to the patient. The health system believed that the best way to encourage patients to use virtual follow-up care was to have the physicians and advanced practice providers be the telehealth ambassadors. Baystate developed exclusion and inclusion criteria that providers could use to help identify the most appropriate patients for telehealth. In terms of diagnosis and complicity of the problem, Baystate let the providers determine who they thought was the best candidate telehealth.

“The goal is to have the provider be the champion because they have the relationship with the patient and the patient trusts the provider,” says Dr. Kalamkar. Paskausky adds: “The best marketing for telehealth is a trusted provider saying ‘Let’s follow-up by telehealth.’ This approach leverages the unique advantages of hybrid office and virtual visits.”

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Badal Kalamkar, MD, MPH
Medical Director of Telehealth, Baystate Health



Once the provider has identified an eligible patient, the provider gives the patient an introduction to telemedicine, which is supplemented with handouts and marketing materials explaining how to download the app, who to call with questions or issues, what the cost is and more. When the patient is finished with their in-person visit, they are directed to a clinic staff member who schedules their virtual follow-up visit in the scheduling system. The patient is then sent an email with information, as well as a link to join the visit at the scheduled date and time.

Initial results: happy patients and providers

While it’s still too early to see the impact virtual follow-up care has had on wait times and appointment availability, patient and provider reception has been overwhelmingly positive.

“Some patients are still unsure about how telehealth could benefit them, but once they try it most love it,” says Paskausky. Patients most willing to try follow-up telehealth tend to be between the ages of 30 and 50.

Provider reception has also been positive, and Baystate’s strategy of scheduling telemedicine shifts for providers is a contributing factor to this provider satisfaction. These telemedicine shifts allow providers time to finish documentation, and if there is a no-show via telehealth, providers can catch up on other tasks like calling patients with lab results—something they would typically do after 6 pm. “Telemedicine has helped improve the quality of life for the providers and makes them more efficient,” says Dr. Kalamkar “Keeping an optimal balance of telemedicine and in-person care has been crucial to the program’s success.”

Baystate Health plans to integrate the telehealth platform with their EMR and scheduling systems to streamline the user experience for patients, providers, and operational staff. The goal is that this will increase satisfaction of the experience and result in more video visits.