



PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATES

Pediatric Associates: How Telehealth Triage Evolved into one of the Nation's Largest Pediatric Telehealth Programs

And how costly in-person care for Managed Medicaid patients was reduced as a result

Problem

Pediatric Associates, the largest privately-owned primary care pediatric practice in the country, is responsible for more than 500,000 lives, 55 percent of whom are covered under Managed Medicaid. The pediatric practice was in search of a way to better triage its existing patients to help divert them away from costly, unnecessary in-person care within primary care offices and emergency departments, while still maintaining exceptional continuity of care.

Solution

Pediatric Associates partnered with American Well to incorporate video visits into its triage line for existing patients. The two companies also worked together to integrate American Well's technology into Pediatric Associates' EHR to provide coordinated care for patients.

Result

Utilizing established pediatric triage protocols and adapting them for telehealth visits, Pediatric Associates was able to utilize its triage line to drive down unnecessary in-person visits for both commercial and Managed Medicaid patients. Through integration between American Well's technology and the Pediatric Associates EHR, Pediatric Associates providers maintain care coordination while caring for patients via telehealth. To date, Pediatric Associates has seen:

- 75 percent decrease in patient wait times due to telehealth
- More than 3,000 video visits per month
- Exceptional patient and provider satisfaction of telehealth

In addition, through a pilot program utilizing TytoCare Home Kits, Pediatric Associates has been able to reduce emergency room usage by 60% among families who are high ER utilizers for low-acuity conditions.

75%

Decrease in patient wait time due to telehealth

60%

Reduction in ER use among high ER utilizers for low-acuity conditions

3000+

Telehealth visits per month with existing patients

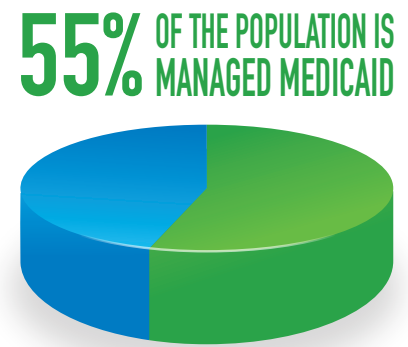
Setting goals: ER diversion and improved access to care

Pediatric Associates is the largest privately-owned primary care pediatric practice in the country, with more than 300 providers and 35 locations. The pediatric practice, which is located in Florida, cares for more than 500,000 patients, 55 percent of whom are in risk-based contracts under Managed Medicaid.

Due to its shared risk savings with insurance companies, Pediatric Associates performed a claims data analysis and saw that many pediatric patients were utilizing the emergency department for low-acuity conditions that could be better treated either in a primary care office or through telehealth. “With a better understanding of the behavior patterns of those most at-risk, with a propensity to utilize emergency services for common ailments our telehealth mission was clear: Provide immediate access to our healthcare providers through mobile with minimal effort,” says Scott Farr, Chief Operating Officer at Pediatric Associates.

In addition to high emergency room utilization, Pediatric Associates also saw high patient volumes within their own primary care offices. To free up in-office availability for patients who truly needed in-person care by directing those who didn’t to another location, Pediatric Associates hoped to create better same-day appointment availability.

To achieve its goals of ER diversion and improved access to care, Pediatric Associates partnered with American Well to implement telehealth visits into its triage line.



“Once we were ready to make the commitment to video telehealth, we needed a vendor that could get us up and running quickly. We knew American Well was the company to do that,” says Amy VerLusteffen, APRN, Director of Telehealth & Patient Contact Center at Pediatric Associates. “They could give us the video connection we wanted, as well as work with our EHR vendor to give us full integration.”

Integrating telehealth into the triage line

Whether a Pediatric Associates patient needs to make an appointment, get a referral or obtain a school form, they call the same phone line. When a patient or parent is looking to make an appointment, they press a prompt that connects them directly to a medical assistant, RN, or LPN. This triage line uses established pediatric triage protocols to help direct patients to the appropriate site of care. Prior to partnering with American Well, Pediatric Associates clinical phone agents followed a set of triage protocols to determine if the patient needed to go to the emergency room, have a same-day office visit, have a next available office visit within 12-18 hours, be treated via phone, or get home care advice.

“Pediatric Associates has always been one of the most innovative forward-thinking pediatric providers in the nation,” says Farr. “Early on we knew it would be in our patients’ best interest to adopt a video telehealth solution.”

When Pediatric Associates went live with video telehealth in 2017, the team reexamined the triage line protocols and moved a large amount of conditions to a video telehealth visit. For example, rashes were very difficult

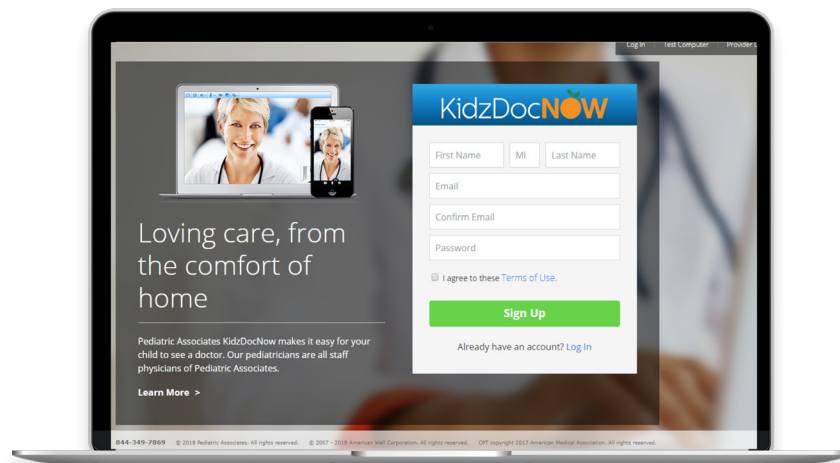
to diagnose and treat over the phone and typically required an office visit. “Now, our rash protocol says, ‘if there is a rash without any other symptoms, offer a telehealth visit.’ And instead of telehealth being the last option offered, it’s the first option,” says Verlsteffen.

During triage, if the clinical phone agent determines that telehealth is the best care option for the patient, they offer a telehealth visit, explain what that entails, and inform them that they will be able to see a doctor within the next hour. The clinical phone agent also confirms that they have the necessary technology to conduct a video visit (smartphone, iPad, computer), and that they have access to Wi-Fi. If the person calling is a parent, they confirm that the parent is currently with the child in need of care.

The clinical phone agent then schedules a “T Video” visit with a physician using Pediatric Associates’ normal scheduling platform. Once the appointment is booked an email is sent to the patient. When the patient clicks the link in the email, it directs them to Pediatric Associates telehealth app, KidzDocNow, where they sign in and begin the visit.

For commercial patients, the charge for a telehealth visit is \$49. Pediatric Associates bills the insurance company, and whatever the insurance company does not cover, the patient is responsible for. For uninsured patients, the cost is still \$49, which is significantly less than an in-office visit, and for Medicaid patients there is no charge.

Patients are directed to KidzDocNow



The provider perspective: staffing, engagement and protocols

Staffing KidzDocNow

Pediatric Associates uses its own providers to staff the telehealth platform. When first launched, care was delivered through KidzDocNow from 7am to midnight Monday through Friday, and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. As of 2019, Pediatric Associates offers 24/7 care through telehealth. The pediatric practice has a total of 16 providers who staff the service—all devoted primarily to telehealth.

Encouraging Provider Adoption

The 35 Pediatric Associates offices throughout Florida were experiencing very high visit volumes, but moving some of those visits toward telehealth was met with some reluctance from providers.

To help with provider adoption of video telehealth, Pediatric Associates held many discussions, specifically around triage protocols. “We made the decision initially to address general conditions that would have likely been a phone call that we could not bill for, such as pink eye and breastfeeding concerns,” says Versteffen. As they began treating these conditions via telehealth, the team was able to develop more protocols for telehealth which resulted in increased provider acceptance.

Developing triage line protocols to include video telehealth

Developing the appropriate protocols was essential to provider adoption of telehealth. Pediatric Associates was already using established pediatric triage protocols for its triage line; however, these needed to be updated with the addition of video visits. Pediatric Associates formed a leadership team that included the Chief Medical Officer, shareholders and physicians. The team met regularly to develop and review protocols. Once the group finalized the protocols, they were presented to the Quality Committee, which was comprised of physicians from Pediatric Associates, to review and approve the protocols for use.

Through the development of these protocols, Pediatric Associates has been able to move a large amount of “next available visit within 12-18 hours” visits, and even same-day visits, to telehealth.

Maintaining Care Coordination via Telehealth

From the beginning, Pediatric Associates knew its telehealth program needed to integrate with its EHR to maintain care continuity for its pediatric patients. The practice specifically wanted its clinicians to chart within the EHR for telehealth visits and be able to see past medical history.

American Well’s team worked with Pediatric Associates EHR, TriMed Technologies, to fully integrate the two systems. Through this integration, Pediatric Associates providers can chart and document within TriMed Technologies during telehealth visits.

“This was an integral part of our moving forward. We needed integration because we wanted patient charts to remain intact,” says Versteffen. “We also wanted the telemedicine visits to be visible by the PCPs.”

While Pediatric Associates hired many of its existing physicians for telehealth, they also hired physicians who were not previously part of Pediatric Associates. It was important that these new physicians were able to first train in Pediatric Associates offices to see how the practice operates and learn the EHR. Once those physicians moved over to telehealth, they were already familiar with the EHR and documentation, and had an easier time adapting to the technology.



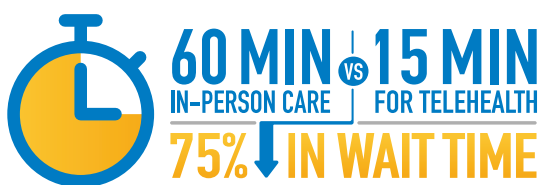
Early Results: Providing Patients with Better Care Options

Since integrating video telehealth into its triage line in 2017, Pediatric Associates has seen impressive growth in patient and provider adoption.

“Our team continues to regularly monitor feedback from both our patients and clinicians,” says Farr. “We understand the importance of an exceptional patient experience but equally as important is the quality of care that our patients receive through telehealth.”

For Medicaid patients, Pediatric Associates’ goal was to decrease costs through ED and PCP diversion for low-acuity symptoms. While the practice is doing around 3,000 telehealth visits per month, they still serve a huge patient population of more than 500,000. In 2019, Pediatric Associates began marketing telehealth and offering it beyond its current patient portal, and expects to see cost savings associated with its Managed Medicaid population.

“Even without a structured telehealth marketing campaign we are treating over 3,000 patients virtually each month,” tells Versteffen.



Pediatric Associates has provided its patients better, more immediate access to care. The average wait time in a Pediatric Associates office is around 60 minutes, while the average wait time for a telehealth visit—from the time they sign on to the time they finish the visit—is around 15 minutes. This equates to a 75 percent decrease in wait time.

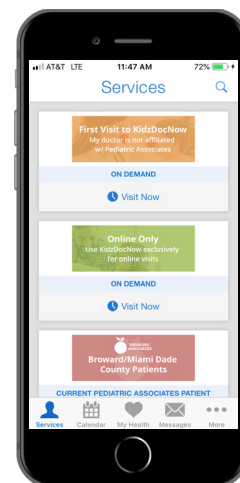
Looking Ahead: Addressing high ER utilizers for low-acuity conditions

With a highly successfully telehealth triage program in place, Pediatric Associates searched for other ways telehealth could help care for pediatric patients.

In February 2019, Pediatric Associates expanded KidzDocNow beyond its triage line to help care for all pediatric patients in the state of Florida. Now, in addition to patients that belong to Pediatric Associates, providers can also see patients who need urgent care services but may not have access to their own pediatrician. “Our on-demand urgent care practice continues to provide impressive results with approximately 500 visits a month,” says Versteffen.

The goal of the on-demand program is to drive patients directly to the KidzDocNow app without having to call the office. When a patient does initiate an on-demand video visit, they are greeted on screen by a telehealth triage nurse who collects their detailed medical history and determines if their symptoms are eligible for telehealth. If eligible for telehealth, the patient is placed in the clinician waiting room. If their symptoms require in-person care, the triage nurse will either schedule them an in-person appointment (if they are a current Pediatric Associates patient) or refer them to their own pediatrician if it is during regular office hours.

In addition to on-demand visits, Pediatric Associates also launched a telehealth pilot program using TytoCare Home Kits. The TytoHome device helps parents and patients examine ears, throat, heart, lungs, abdomen, and skin, as well as captures heart rate and temperature data. Through an integration with Pediatric Associate’s KidzDocNow Plus app, remote physicians can have live video visits and use the data captured to diagnose and treat the patient.



**KidzDocNow
On-Demand App**

In January 2019, Pediatric Associates delivered TytoCare Home devices to 60 families who were high ER utilizers for low-acuity symptoms. Because most of these families had multiple children, 145 patients were included in the pilot program.

In the first four months, Pediatric Associates has reduced ER usage by 60% in this pilot population. “The impact so far has been tremendous,” says Verlsteffen.

60% REDUCTION IN ER USE AMONG HIGH ER UTILIZERS FOR LOW-ACUITY CONDITIONS

Pediatric Associates is piloting TytoHome with patients who are high ER utilizers for low-acuity conditions



Pediatric Associates receives a notification when a patient in the pilot program visits the emergency room, and follows up to determine the reason for the visit. “It’s at this point that we are able to remind them of the TytoCare Home device and all the diagnoses that can be done from home without having to go to the ER,” says Verlsteffen. “We are actively engaging our care management team to continue to identify patients and families who could benefit from this program.”

In addition, Pediatric Associates is also interested in distributing TytoCare Home devices to high-risk patients, such as asthmatic patients, to keep patients within the medical home and increase population health management goals.

“Providing a much-needed benefit to an at risk population enabled Pediatric Associates to effectively manage costs while still ensuring our patients receive the highest quality of care. By successfully utilizing enhanced technology we have positioned ourselves to extend our virtual care services beyond our current patients and outside of Florida,” says Farr.

Pediatric Associates Company Overview

Founded in 1955, Pediatric Associates is one of the oldest and most respected pediatric practices in the United States. Pediatric Associates opened its first office in Hollywood, Florida. The Company was one of the first medical groups to introduce satellite office locations in consumer retail locations. They were also one of the first pediatric groups to embrace managed care in the 1970s, collaborating with insurance plans as healthcare partners with the common interest of providing South Florida’s children with the best healthcare available. Today, Pediatric Associates is focused on value-based care and is the national leader in pediatric population health management with over 200,000 patients under global risk and over half million active patients. The group is now further developing its geographic presence in Florida and beyond, as well as, expanding its pediatric sub-specialty services to assure continuity of care over the continuum.

Keeping abreast of the shift from volume to value, medical advances and changing lifestyles, Pediatric Associates’ modern facilities offer comprehensive pediatric services, including digital imaging and moderate level laboratories as well as a robust compliment of virtual care through its telemedicine platform. The Company currently has 35 neighborhood locations, which are staffed by more than 300 employed providers who proudly serve families throughout Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and St. Lucie County as well as in Tampa and Jacksonville. Pediatric Associates will continue to bring the best possible, high quality healthcare service to its patients well into the 21st Century. Ease of access, prompt courteous service and responsiveness to our patients’ concerns will always be their primary goal.

Pediatric Associates has continued to thrive in today’s healthcare evolution by embracing the shift from volume to value and is now focused on growing their platform nationally through payor partnership and organic and inorganic growth.