



A Click of a Button

How technology connects doctors with patients and saves money

In today's age of on-the-go technology, consumers expect to be able to get the information or services they need quickly — often with just a click of a button. For many consumers, this includes how they receive medical services.

“As technology evolves, the way we communicate is evolving as well,” says Susan Lehne, acting manager at HealthLink. “This is true for how patients communicate with their doctors, which also could represent a cost-savings to an employer's health plan.”

How has technology changed the way people communicate with their doctors?

Technology has drastically affected the way we communicate over the past decade. From email, text messaging, instant messaging and video chatting, we now have quicker, more on-demand options for how we communicate with each other.

With these advancements, there has also been a change in people's expectations. For example, if someone's preferred method of communication is email, they expect their doctor's office to be able to communicate with them in that same manner.

As technology evolves, more people are questioning the status quo. Like any other good or service they purchase, they expect to have options

when it comes to where and how they receive medical services. Why should someone have to leave their home or their office to talk to a doctor for a minor cold? People expect everyday activities, like going to the doctor, to become quicker, easier and more efficient because of technology.

What kind of programs capitalize on technological advancements?

Programs such as telemedicine, video chat and 24-hour nurse lines all capitalize on the latest technology. They are designed to make it quicker and easier for people to have their health care needs met via non-traditional methods.

Patients can now receive professional, effective and convenient care through access to nurses and on-demand consultations with U.S. board-certified doctors available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without driving to the doctor's office. These programs treat a variety of common ailments such as cold and flu, sinus infections and bronchitis, and in some cases, can even prescribe medicine.

Technology-based programs will never entirely replace face-to-face appointments for patients who prefer that experience, or in emergencies, but they can be a great option to get the care you need without leaving your home or work.

How can these programs help save employers money?

Technology-based consults cost less than a normal office visit, retail health or urgent care visit, and they can save hundreds of dollars over a trip to the emergency room (ER).

Often, these programs can be set up on a per use basis, meaning if an employee doesn't use the benefit, the employer doesn't pay for it. There may also be an option to include a co-pay, which means the employee covers some of the costs of the visit.

These programs can play a big role in avoiding unnecessary utilization and ER visits by helping employees decide where to go for care.

Are these products hard to implement?

Not at all. Implementing these programs usually only involves a little employee education. Employers should check with their third party administrator or network partner about the tools and resources available for implementation. There is an array of marketing materials that can be used to educate employees and ensure the program is a success.