

Six Things to Consider When Selecting Your Telehealth Network

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Healthcare organizations around the world are seeing the transformational effects of telehealth networks. From radically improved methods of delivering care, to education, communication and even administration efficiency, telehealth networks are eliminating the distances between patients and caregivers, between physicians and educators, and among medical facilities.

SIX FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING YOUR TELEHEALTH NETWORK

1. Scalability
2. Mobility
3. Compliance
4. Open standards
5. Resource and Network Management
6. ROI



So you are ready to treat patients remotely, improve medical education, reduce patient evaluation times, enhance caregiver productivity and quality of life, streamline hospital operations, reduce costs and rehospitalizations, and ultimately save lives. How do you choose the right telehealth network for you?

Six key factors that are crucial to evaluate as you consider a telehealth network

1. Scalability

Whether large or small, healthcare organizations tend to cover multiple locations, including many remote areas that may not be in top tech shape. Be sure to choose a telehealth system that will not only work in the hospital or doctor's office, but will also be simple and cost-effective enough to scale into small clinics, group homes and even individual patient homes. Scale requirements may vary from just a few users to hundreds and even thousands of participants.

2. Mobility

If you work in the medical field, you know that clinicians, administrators, educators and patients are seemingly always in motion. Reliance on a computer—even a laptop—could significantly reduce the ability for these individuals to be where they need to be. That's why some solutions offer collaboration also runs on mobile devices. This benefit opens up communication and care to practically any location in the world, never leaving anyone disconnected.

But which mobile device should your telehealth system support?

Recent studies have shown 70% of physicians in the United States have their own tablet devices and want to use them at work. Organizations are beginning to accommodate this bring your own device (BYOD) trend, which means telehealth systems must not only work on "network-approved devices;" they must work on any and every smartphone, tablet or similar device available.

3. Compliance

Choosing the right telecommunications system becomes far more mission-critical when it will be used in an industry that must ensure compliance. Healthcare is no exception. Telehealth systems cannot skimp—they absolutely must meet the regulatory standards of local medical certifications. They must also be secure, so they proactively protect patient health information and privacy regardless of network type or device.

When looking for a system encompassing all of the above, consider telehealth networks currently trusted by leading health systems.

4. Open standards

One of the most important aspects of a highly effective telehealth system is its ability to reach anyone, anywhere. More than ever, patients are making their own decisions

regarding which group of specialists to consult. And healthcare professionals aren't simply looking for collaboration within their groups—they are searching for the best advice they can find, period. That means connecting not just to affiliated organizations, but also to those with their own systems in place.

Open standards allow healthcare professionals to communicate across any platform and any vendor. This not only increases reach; it also increases the ROI of your technology, making it useful regardless of acquisitions, system overhauls, or more.

5. Resource and network management

As healthcare extends more and more to remote offices, homes and individuals, providing the best quality telecommunication with the smallest bandwidth requirement becomes more than a "nice to have." Telemedicine must work without the need for tech support "house calls," yet the overarching telehealth system must have enterprise-grade management capabilities for clinical applications. Finding a system that can work on both sides of this spectrum is crucial for taking your telehealth everywhere it has the potential to go.

6. ROI

While pricing for telehealth systems continues to become more affordable and attainable for large and small organizations alike, the key to making the right business decision is to look at your potential ROI. Less expensive systems may look promising, but systems that do not gain acceptance throughout your network will offer no ROI at all.

Investing in a multi-purpose platform that can be utilized for administration, business communications, medical education, patient and internal trainings, and telemedicine will increase utilization and offer a proven, positive ROI in a shockingly short timeframe.

Choosing the right telehealth system may seem overwhelming. Reviewing your options and their history of success in your field helps. Talking to other healthcare leaders and investigating which solutions they use may also be effective. By focusing on what really matters and narrowing your work down to a small handful of key decision factors, you'll find it can be surprisingly simple to see which systems are healthiest for your organization.



About the author

Ron Emerson RN BSN is Global Director of Healthcare for Polycom. A recognized thought leader in the field of telehealth, Mr. Emerson has developed a variety of innovative video-based clinical, medical education and social service applications, and has consulted on telehealth deployments worldwide. Mr. Emerson utilizes nearly 20 years experience in the healthcare industry to advance the field of telehealth, and after serving on the ATA Board of Directors from 2008-2009, received the 2010 American Telemedicine Association Industry Council Award for his leadership in this space. Prior to his work at Polycom, Mr. Emerson held the position of Executive Director for a large telemedicine operation in the United States, where he was responsible for the efficient provision of services to 350 sites.

About Polycom

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