

# In Conversation

A Physician Discusses  
**COVID-19 & Telemedicine**



A discussion with **DAVID CHARLES, MD**

## Q How do you define telemedicine?

**Dr. Charles:** Telemedicine is remote clinical care. It leverages technology to create real-time communication so that medical care can take place anywhere. When most people think of telemedicine, they think of audio-video conferencing.

There's also telehealth, a broader concept that can take many forms. For example, store-and-forward imaging is a type of telehealth. This is where patients can take a picture of, say, a rash, and then use a secure platform to share it with their health care provider.

## Q How can telemedicine help patients during the COVID-19 outbreak?

**Dr. Charles:** If one of my patients were to come in for an appointment, they would have to enter a hospital treating patients with active COVID-19. That could be terribly dangerous for some patients and could contribute to the spread of the virus. Many patients can receive the same level of care, and in a safer setting, using telemedicine.

Telemedicine also increases access to specialty care in community settings. A specialist can see patients in emergency situations or provide routine visits for patients who otherwise couldn't access that care.

## Q What are some barriers to telemedicine?

**Dr. Charles:** The number one barrier is insurance companies. The number two barrier? Insurance companies. Number three? Insurance companies. Four? ...State licensure.

Insurance companies have fought for years to limit patient access to telemedicine.

State licensure rules introduce another problem by preventing doctors from treating patients across state lines. Technology is advancing, but we have archaic rules holding us back from realizing the potential of telemedicine.

## Q What can the COVID-19 outbreak teach policymakers about telemedicine?

**Dr. Charles:** It forces people to think creatively about health care delivery. This has created a window of willingness for patients, clinicians, administrators and policymakers to leverage technology to deliver health care

In the near term, telemedicine can help the health care system shoulder the challenges posed by COVID-19.

In the long term, policymakers will discover a new group of people who have seen telemedicine work firsthand and want continued access in the future.



**Alliance for  
Patient Access**

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