

How Teledentistry Is Helping Everyone Get Access To Dental Care

By PokitDok Team, 12th October 2016



One particularly interesting application of telehealth technology is dentistry. It sounds a little counterintuitive — how can someone take care of your teeth remotely? But the potential benefits are too numerous for people not to take notice.

Teledentistry creates a remote connection between patient and dentist, but it doesn't remove the human element entirely. Often, a dental assistant can be present to examine a patient while the dentist remotely observes and offers guidance. The dentist can also directly interact with the patient via email or app, can give advice and monitor a patient's progress.

There's a clear benefit to dentists embracing teledentistry. The dental marketplace is becoming extremely competitive, and a teledentistry service is another way for dentists to set themselves apart from their competitors.

Denteractive (<http://blog.denteractive.com/uncategorized/teledentistry-dental-practice/>), a service provider, reports that:

- **7%** of patients will switch their healthcare professional to one that uses video conferencing.
- **63%** of consumers have higher confidence in a diagnosis from a video call rather than an email or phone call.
- **64%** of patients are comfortable talking to their doctor through video conferencing.

Mouthwatch (<https://www.mymouthwatch.com/teledentistry.php>), another teledentistry provider, points out several additional benefits for dentists:

- ability to attract new patients who don't take up in-surgery chair time or resources
- increased revenue streams for dentists and hygienists
- more visibility for a dentist as they provide teledentistry care in their communities
- convert teledentistry evaluations into in-office treatments when needed

There's a strong need for good teledentistry services and practices across many different areas and age groups.





Teledentistry For Senior Living Facilities

Seniors sometimes neglect their oral care, especially in senior living facilities. Teledentistry can reduce the effort and cost of getting a dental exam and provide the right treatments for senior patients.

"This would be wonderful for nursing homes especially," American Dental Hygienists' Association President Diann Bomkamp told Missouri lawmakers in (<http://themissouritimes.com/26956/dental-hygienists-lobby-for-extension-teledentistry/>) February. "Many dental problems can arise quickly and spread rapidly with the elderly as their medications and conditions change. Allowing a hygienist to visit places like nursing homes with a written agreement with their dentist could ensure that many patients get the services they need even if their home or abilities changes."

In Rural Communities

Rural communities often lack easy access to dental care, with people having to travel many miles to see the closest dentist. Teledentistry can help close this gap. In central New York state, for example, Finger Lakes Community Health (<http://flchealth.org/telehealth/>) (FLCH) has created a teledentistry program to reach immigrant farm workers and members of the local Mennonite community, who often live more than 100 miles away from dental specialists, David Rath at Healthcare Informatics (<http://www.healthcare-informatics.com/blogs/david-raths/teledentistry-making-difference-rural-new-york>) reports.

FLCH uses teledentistry to examine and screen dental patients, provide urgent care, consult on dental problems, teach oral care, and follow up on treatments. The service has significantly improved access to high-quality dental care and increased the specialist care completion rate to more than 90 percent.

How Teledentistry Is Helping Children And Schools

Some children in this country have serious issues with their teeth. Those issues aren't limited to pure dental health, either. Unhealthy teeth impact so many areas of their lives.

"Persistent pain, along with related trouble eating and sleeping, makes oral health one of the leading causes of chronic school absenteeism among young students," the Healthy Schools Campaign (<https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/policy/teledentistry-reducing-absenteeism-by-supporting-student-health/>) writes. "...Children between 5 and 17 years old miss nearly two million school days in a single year nationwide due to dental health-related problems."

Teledentistry is having a big impact on children, schools, and education. It allows students to stay at school and get the education they need. A focus on preventative oral care reduces ER visits and urgent dental emergencies, resulting in less absenteeism and more time for learning.

Trained dental health professionals (often dental hygienists) are sent to schools and can provide preventative care and carry out simple dental procedures. They essentially can create a pop-up dental clinic and offer many of the treatments available at a dental practice.

That's good news for the children. "By making preventive care and basic treatment accessible in schools, tele... significant barriers children face to good attendance and academic success," says the Healthy Schools Campaign. "This helps improve children's education and for their lifetime health."

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Teledentistry For Children Across The US

From California to Georgia, healthcare providers, dentists, and policymakers understand the need for good teledentistry.

In California, KQED (<http://ww2.kqed.org/stateofhealth/2015/12/22/teledentistry-could-boost-access-to-californias-poor-kids-but-is-little-used-why/>) reported that teledentistry is improving the lives of the children of low income families. A dentist, Dr. Yogita Thakur, is able to carry out examinations remotely through teledentistry provided by off-site dental hygienists. "This is how we reach children in areas where dental care is usually limited," she says.

And in Georgia, the Department of Public Health (<https://dph.georgia.gov/blog/2016-01-08/children-enjoy-healthy-smiles-through-school-based-teledentistry-clinics>) says elementary students across South Georgia are benefitting from teledentistry. "These are students living in a rural area," says Suleima Salgado, director of telehealth and telemedicine. "They could drive for 45 minutes and never see a dentist office."

It's clear that teledentistry is making a real and profound change in people's lives. As more dentists embrace the technology, more patients will be able to get access to the dental care they need.

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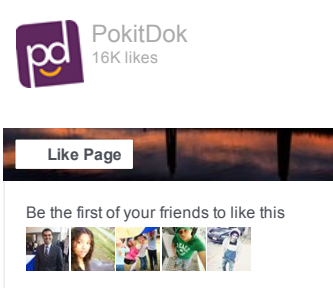
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