Now that we have a better understanding of the potential for telehealth, Dr. Tewksbury reflects on the healthcare trajectory in the U.S. "It wasn't until the late 1990s that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported significant implementation of telehealth in the U.S., and by 2012, telehealth visits among rural residents were at about 5% of all visits. However, this statistic is expected to rise dramatically in the next three years, with a greater percentage of patients nationally using telehealth services for many different reasons.

The Future

While telehealth provides convenience in format and schedule for the patient, the healthcare provider also needs to recognize the impact that the office setting has on the patient-clinician relationship. Telehealth services, except for urgent care, are not the “Gold Standard,” according to Dr. Tewksbury, for any provider interested in digital health technology and how to navigate a process toward telehealth delivery. She advises a close collaboration with IT and technology management to develop a system that is efficient and safe for both the patient and the provider.

Challenges remain, as well as questions. "How has telehealth augmentation of in-person office visits affected the quality of patient care? Results of a recent study showed that true telehealth visits had modestly better performance in three of five outcomes compared to in-person visits. However, the study had a small sample size and there is still more research needed to determine the long-term impact of telehealth on patient outcomes."

In 2010, the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) published "Telemedicine’s Future: A Vision for Transforming Healthcare in America," which is now considered a policy statement. The ATA has since updated its guidelines to reflect the current state of telehealth technology and services, with a focus on the integration of telehealth with other healthcare delivery models. The ATA also provides resources for providers to learn more about telehealth and how to incorporate it into their practice. The ATA encourages providers to take part in the ATA’s telehealth projects, which include the creation of clinical telehealth applications, the development of telehealth curricula, and the promotion of best practices for telehealth services.

The ATA also encourages providers to explore the use of telehealth in various settings, including hospitals, clinics, and rural communities. The ATA has developed a telehealth implementation playbook to help providers develop and implement telehealth programs in their settings. The playbook includes evidence-based recommendations for telehealth implementation, including guidelines for selecting telehealth technologies, developing telehealth policies, and training telehealth providers.

The ATA also encourages providers to consider the use of telehealth in acute care settings, such as emergency departments, where telehealth can provide access to care for patients who may not have access to care otherwise. The ATA has developed a telehealth implementation playbook for emergency departments, which includes evidence-based recommendations for telehealth implementation and training.

The ATA also encourages providers to consider the use of telehealth in rural communities, where telehealth can provide access to care for patients who may not have access to care otherwise. The ATA has developed a telehealth implementation playbook for rural communities, which includes evidence-based recommendations for telehealth implementation and training.

The ATA also encourages providers to consider the use of telehealth in long-term care settings, such as nursing homes, where telehealth can provide access to care for elderly patients. The ATA has developed a telehealth implementation playbook for long-term care settings, which includes evidence-based recommendations for telehealth implementation and training.

In conclusion, telehealth provides an opportunity for healthcare providers to expand their reach and improve access to care for patients. The ATA encourages providers to explore the use of telehealth in various settings, including hospitals, clinics, and rural communities. The ATA also provides resources for providers to learn more about telehealth and how to incorporate it into their practice. The ATA encourages providers to take part in the ATA’s telehealth projects, which include the creation of clinical telehealth applications, the development of telehealth curricula, and the promotion of best practices for telehealth services.