Telemedicine in Oncology

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For patients who have difficulty traveling to a clinic or doctor’s office because of living in a remote location or lack of transportation, increasing opportunities exist to access health care remotely. Telemedicine is a growing field that has potential benefits for patients, providers, and the healthcare system.

At a Glance
- Telemedicine increases access to care for those living in remote locations.
- Telemedicine services may decrease costs for the healthcare system.
- Many barriers exist for using telemedicine because of federal and state laws written prior to the development of this technology.

Telemedicine Benefits

The telemedicine market is growing rapidly. Data estimates on the growth of telemedicine services predict an increase in use from about 350,000 visits in 2014 to 7 million visits by 2018 (Cocchi, 2014). Telemedicine can potentially be a cost-effective alternative to the traditional healthcare system. A study by Lee, Stewart, and Calugar-Pop (2014) found that, by the end of 2014, an estimated 100 million telemedicine visits across the world resulted in $5 billion in savings for the healthcare system and that the greatest users of this technology will likely be in North America. In addition to improved access to care, telemedicine has been shown to improve health outcomes and patient satisfaction (Mair, Whitten, May, & Doolittle, 2000; Mooi, Whop, Valery, & Sabesan, 2012; Taylor, Khoo, Saltman, Boutilier, & Porter, 2007; Weinerman, den Duyf, Hughes, & Robertson, 2005). A randomized, controlled trial of patients with prostate cancer after radical prostatectomy compared video visits to office visits and found an equivalency in efficiency of the visit measured in wait time, total time devoted to care, and face time. Equivalent patient and provider satisfaction also occurred when comparing office and video visits (Viers et al., 2015).