5 Tips for a Successful Telemedicine Visit

A patient's guide to mastering a telemedicine visit with your oncologist or other medical providers.

July 24, 2020 By Jessica Cordova

Telemedicine is not a new concept. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, it might not be something that many providers or patients are becoming familiar with. Recently, it was announced that over 200,000 virtual primary care and specialty visits have occurred since the start of the pandemic at UCHealth, where University of Colorado (CU) Cancer Center doctors provide care.

"Overnight, we've learned how to do things remotely. I'm seeing patients from very remote places and it's almost as good as if they had driven 10 hours, stayed in a hotel, saw me for a short appointment, and then drove back 10 hours," says Richard Schulick, MD, MBA, director of the CU Cancer Center Director, and professor and chair of the CU Department of Surgery. "I see this as a long-term benefit that is coming out of this horrible disease."

When a patient is identified for a telemedicine visit, the providers are very confident they can learn everything they need. Telemedicine visits are useful for people at every stage of their cancer journey, whether they are currently in treatment, finished with their care or recently diagnosed. Most of the things our doctors would learn about a patient in an office visit are communicated just as well in a telemedicine visit. Of course, the inability to examine the patient is a potential downside, but many decisions can be made despite this.

It seems like telemedicine is here to stay so we wanted to make sure our cancer patients know how to get the most out of there telemedicine visits with the following tips.

1. Treat a telemedicine visit just like a regular visit.

Plan for your appointment like you would an in-person visit. Write down any questions, concerns or symptoms you're experiencing before the telehealth visit. If possible, know your vital signs, blood pressure, heart rate, temperature and weight, before the appointment.

If you are seeing a new caregiver or medial team, have your medical history and list of medications readily available.

During the appointment be sure to take notes, writing down any directions or treatment plans the doctor shares.

Remember, this is your time with your health care provider, be sure to ask questions and repeat any instructions your physician gave you during your visit. By doing this, you ensure that you heard everything correctly.

2. Feel free to include another person.

We encourage patients to have a family member or friend around for the telemedicine visit. They can help with any equipment issues that may arise and support taking notes. It is also helpful for them to be able to ask questions and help the doctor if needing to do an exam.

A benefit of a telemedicine visit is that the person joining the appointment could be in a different location from the patient. This also is helpful with social distancing if the person joining the appointment does not live with the patient.

3. Don’t stress about the technology.

It is easy to get anxious about whether you will need to troubleshoot if there is a problem with the technology before or during the call. But it is important not to worry.

Before the telemedicine visit make sure you have all the right software on your computer, phone or tablet. Don’t be shy to ask for help if you need it. Another thing to check before the appointment is that your devices are charged, the volume is at an appropriate level and the microphone picks up your voice clearly. We advise you to sign in for your appointment early to ensure everything is working properly.

Remember, if something happens with the video you can always jump on a call with your doctor to make the most of your time.

4. Determine the next steps.

Before the end of your virtual visit, make plans on how you should follow up. Do you need to schedule your next appointment using your UCHealth app or call the front desk?

Also, be sure you are clear if there are any changes to your medications and if you will need to make a trip to the pharmacy.

5. Set the scene.

Before starting your call make sure you are in a quiet place that you can focus on your conversation with your doctor and not have other distractions. Also, make sure you are in a place where you can talk openly about your condition and any concerns you might have. If that needs to be the kitchen pantry, do it! Just make sure you have good lighting. Avoid sitting with your back to a window, as that can darken your video image.

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