

# Evolving management strategies for patient service excellence: Is your practice up to speed?

Leverage technology in your practice to enhance your patients' experience. The authors offer insights on telemedicine, social media, and office organization strategies.

Monica N. Schointuch, MD; Sally F. Vitez, MD; and Joseph S. Sanfilippo, MD, MBA

## IN THIS ARTICLE

Telemedicine  
[this page](#)

Office reengineering  
[page 47](#)

Social media presence  
[page 48](#)

Over the past decade, the use of technology with the focus on optimizing the consumer experience has exploded throughout numerous industries, including education, retail, and entertainment. Within health care, we would be naïve to ignore patient expectations for an optimized consumer experience within our offices. Thus, clinicians across all health care disciplines must remain cognizant of and work to optimize the patient experience in the ever-expanding world of health care.



Dr. Schointuch is Fellow, Department of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pennsylvania.



Dr. Vitez is Fellow, Department of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.



Dr. Sanfilippo is Professor, Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, and Director, Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility, at Magee-Womens Hospital, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He also serves on the OBG MANAGEMENT Board of Editors.

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Reengineering one's practice will continue to be a work in progress. As medicine and technology continuously advance, clinicians must be able to adapt and implement changes. An excellent example of such adaptation is the use of telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> We hope that the use of telemedicine remains an integral part of our armamentarium as we move forward.

In this article, we offer perspectives on using telemedicine, improving the patient experience, and implementing the use of social media in your practice. We look for a common denominator when provision of clinical care is the topic of discussion. Knowing the details of your medical practice and addressing its highlights as well as its concerns will benefit patients, staff, and health care providers. We hope that you glean some insights that you can apply in your practice.

## Telemedicine: Part of the new normal

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists defines telehealth as a "technology-enhanced health care framework that includes services, such as virtual visits, remote patient monitoring and mobile health care."<sup>2</sup> The American Telemedicine Association and the World Health Organization use the terms *telemedicine* and *telehealth* interchangeably.<sup>3</sup> We live in a relatively new era since the

COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that traditional face-to-face meeting(s) with patients be conducted virtually. The good news is that the outcomes with telehealth visits appear to be on par with those of traditional office visits.<sup>4</sup>

Telehealth allows clinicians to deliver medical evaluation and management plans right in a patient's home and to receive appropriate reimbursement for doing so. This is a result of actions by Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services that removed restrictions related to telemedicine.<sup>5</sup> The telemedicine approach provides a different perspective on provision of care (FIGURE 1).

For telemedicine practice, prerequisites include having the appropriate hardware, software, and a secure internet connection to maintain quality and patient safety.<sup>4</sup> It is wise to check with regulatory laws at the local, state, and federal levels, as some states have separate licensure requirements for delivering this type of health care. Review insurance carrier guidelines as well as medical malpractice coverage for telehealth care provision. Ideally, obtain proof in writing from third-party payers and malpractice insurance carriers. TABLE 1 lists ObGyn-related activities and services that can be provided via telemedicine.<sup>3</sup>

While in many circumstances the indications for telemedicine are obvious, some remain less apparent. For example, patients may be more receptive to the use of telemedicine for counseling and education for family planning services and termination of pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> Psychological counseling lends itself to a telemedicine approach to address levels of anxiety and depression, especially in the postpartum setting.

An initial telemedicine consultation often is complemented by subsequent patient examination when deemed necessary. Pelvic imaging often is ordered to address concerns expressed during the telemedicine visit. Teleradiology is an interesting aspect of telemedicine that is expanding. Telesonography, the use of ultrasound, is extremely relevant to obstetrics and gynecology. Specifically, the development of self-operated endovaginal telemonitors and 3D as well as 4D imaging incorporates self-operated endovaginal telemonitoring. This technology remains a work in progress.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 1 Telemedicine: An alternative way to provide health care**



**TABLE 1 Telemedicine services that ObGyns can provide<sup>3</sup>**

- Well-woman visits
- Preconception counseling
- Postpartum care
- Preventive care
- Infertility
- Psychiatry
- Family planning
- Teleradiology
- Telesurgical follow-up

Another aspect to telemedicine is telesurgery. Although an operative procedure cannot be performed virtually, pre- and post-operative counseling can be provided via telemedicine, offering tremendous convenience to patients.

Understanding the infrastructure of telemedicine and assuring security, adherence with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), state licensure, reimbursement, and medical malpractice aspects is well worth the effort.

## Reengineer your office to enhance the patient experience

**Create a hospitable environment.** One way to do this is by having your front desk staffer standing up to greet patients. The medical management literature has reported an

### FAST TRACK

*Telehealth allows clinicians to deliver medical evaluation and management plans right in a patient's home and to receive appropriate reimbursement for doing so*

**TABLE 2** Areas to address in a patient survey<sup>10</sup>

- Time to get an appointment
- Received timely answers to questions
- Whether or not time to see the clinician at the office visit was satisfactory
- Did the clinician give clear and easy to understand explanations?
- Did the clinician listen carefully to your questions?
- Did the clinician know your important medical history information?
- Did the clinician show respect for what you had to say?
- Did the clinician spend enough time with you?
- Did office personnel assist in key aspects of the treatment plan?
- Did the clinician convey the reasons to take a medication?
- Rate the clinician on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 10 being the highest)

interesting analogy.<sup>8</sup> Picture going to a retailer whose job is to sell you the product you are interested in. Where is that person positioned? Standing at the counter, at eye level with you, doing his or her best to convince you to buy a particular product. Having your office front desk personnel standing is analogous to the “atmosphere (when approaching the front desk) that conveys clear energy and a clear tone or readiness,” all of which contribute to a more positive patient experience.<sup>8</sup>

A hospitable environment at the check-in desk sets the stage for the office visit. When a staffer is sitting at the front desk office entrance point, the concept conveyed to the patient is, “You can wait for us because you need us more than we need you.” Changing the staffer’s posture to a standing position conveys, “Welcome, we are glad to see you and address why you are here.”<sup>8</sup>

**Conduct a flow analysis of your office procedures.** It is clear that the front desk serves as an advertisement of what your practice has to offer. A friendly smile from the receptionist goes a long way. In addition, the total time from patient check-in to checkout should be monitored. Having this type of data aids staff evaluation and patient satisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

Examine your office’s aspects of what the business world calls *throughput*. In essence, problems related to throughput include that the clinician is chronically late or slow with patients or that inadequate time was allocated per patient visit or per procedure.

It is valuable to allocate staff resources ahead of time, including patient registration

and insurance verification details. Staff records review and preparation for the clinician streamlines time with the patient. Having lab tests, other consultations, and so on readily available for the clinician is time well spent by the medical assistants. For procedures, preparation of equipment that is in good working order and having supplies appropriately stocked can help facilitate success and efficiency. Creation of an “electronic on-time board” displays if the clinician is running on time or not.<sup>9</sup> These practical tips can result in better patient and staff satisfaction. In addition, periodic surveys help engage patients in the process. **TABLE 2** provides sample survey questions to ask patients.<sup>10</sup>

Taking a careful look at your current office practices and reengineering them as needed is an investment that provides an excellent return.

### Develop a presence on social media

Having a social media presence is becoming one of the most effective strategies for reaching an intended audience. In the United States, more than 70% of the public uses at least one social media platform.<sup>11</sup> It can be an effective and efficient tool for clinicians to grow their practice; distribute information about unique areas of the practice; and reach potential patients, referring physicians, and prospective faculty/trainees. Social media also is increasingly being used by clinicians to connect with other health care providers in their own specialty or other specialties. Digital communities have been created where ideas are shared and topics of interest are discussed. Clinicians can listen in on expert opinions, disseminate their research, and discuss practice management challenges or health advocacy. **FIGURE 2** provides a snapshot of the social media landscape.

There is a wealth of options when it comes to social media platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and blogs (**TABLE 3**). Facebook has the largest user base of all social media platforms, with approximately 1.7 billion active monthly users; thus, its use creates an opportunity to reach a massive audience.<sup>12,13</sup>

### FAST TRACK

*A hospitable environment at the check-in desk sets the stage for the office visit*

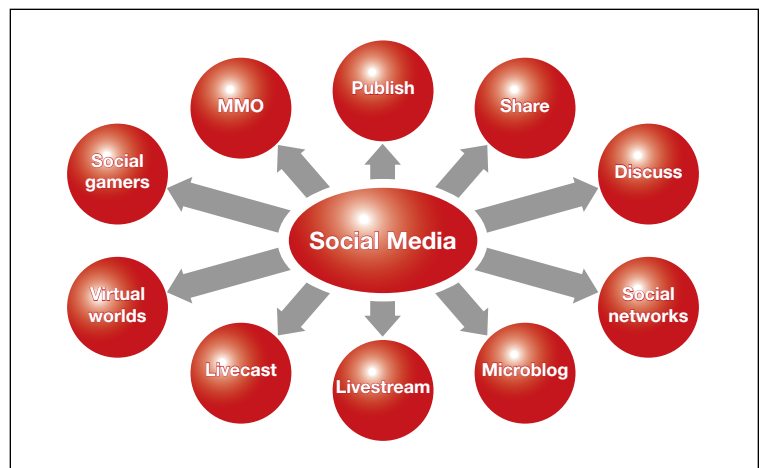
People use Facebook for both personal and professional reasons. The platform allows for sharing of photos, live videos, posted text, and comments. It can be used as a helpful resource to engage patients and disseminate accurate medical information. Importantly, remember that content posted should comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule and that information shared should come from a credible source.

The Mayo Clinic is an impressive example of the use of social media for consumer education, research, and expansion of the reach of its brand. They incorporated social media into their strategic marketing plan, and between 2015 and 2016, social media referrals led to a 139% increase in patient appointment requests.<sup>13</sup> Of the 20 different social media sites used, Facebook was the top social media referrer, accounting for 81% of social media referrals in 2015 and 88% in 2016. They have expanded their reach through different social media platforms and have more than 1.5 million followers on Twitter. Their videos on YouTube were viewed more than 4.9 million times in 2016 alone. This example illustrates social media's effectiveness and the potential role it can play in connecting with patients.

## Final thoughts

The practice of medicine has undeniably changed over the years and will continue to evolve. Understanding how to implement change to ensure that high-quality, efficient patient care is being delivered is paramount.

**FIGURE 2** The social media landscape



We have highlighted various aspects of practice management that you can use to overcome current obstacles and changing standards. The advent of telemedicine has provided easy access to clinicians. Consultation occurs in the comfort of the patient's home, and the ability to provide local examination telecast to a clinician allows physicians and advanced practice practitioners to reach a wider range of patients. Social media has established an infrastructure for educating patients and providers while at the same time conveying educational tools to patients. This level of communication will continue to expand as time progresses.

Practitioners have a whole new cadre to add to their toolbox to provide patients with state-of-the-art communication and care. ●

**TABLE 3**  
**Social media resources**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest

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