

## The Rise of Telemedicine in India

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COVID-19 has ushered forth a new era of virtual healthcare delivery. While the whole country was paralyzed by the COVID-19 epidemic and prolonged lockdowns, digital healthcare companies worked tirelessly to guarantee that the majority of the country's cities were well served for their healthcare needs. In terms of offering access to quality medical professionals for diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of diseases, telemedicine has been at the vanguard and a life-line in the entire range of digital healthcare services. It has been critical in preventing the transmission of infection by keeping people as far away from hospitals and healthcare facilities as possible. During the pandemic, the increased use of telemedicine has resulted in a significant and fundamental shift in the way care is delivered. Telemedicine has become a crucial instrument for the delivery of healthcare services to patients during the pandemic.

The introduction of COVID-19 has emphasized the need for India's healthcare eco-system to be revamped. It is critical to construct the appropriate healthcare infrastructure to meet the population's needs. Telemedicine has risen to prominence, and a change from in-person patient-physician consultations to digitally enabled distant consultations is happening.

Virtual care is estimated to account for about 15-20% of the Indian healthcare system. The persisting rural-urban divide, which sees an uneven distribution of trained doctors and resources, can be addressed by increasing the use of telemedicine.

Technology and the adoption of digital revolutions in the healthcare ecosystem have assisted us in lowering costs and increasing access to healthcare services. It has aided in the delivery

of healthcare to rural areas of the country, as well as cutting travel time, lowering expenses, and providing everyone in the country access to specialist doctors.

Multiple reasons have contributed to the rapid acceptance of telemedicine. Network connectivity has been one of the main factors. In India, the number of smartphone subscribers grew to 740 million in 2020 and is predicted to reach 1 billion by 2025. This, together with the launch of 5G mobile services, will allow for higher speeds and more access to telemedicine applications that demand quicker connectivity. Telemedicine can help drive down the cost of care because to low-cost cellular service providers and a huge population base with internet access.

India needs to see healthcare become more democratic, and telemedicine will play a critical part in achieving this aim. Although telemedicine has been around for a while, it is now attempting to become a focal point in the healthcare system, thus there are obstacles to overcome.

Despite the fact that telemedicine helps to alleviate the demand-supply gap in healthcare delivery, patients still have concerns with regards to doctors (as patients are not face-to-face with doctors). COVID-19, for example, caused pandemic-related anxiety and despair in the general population. The decision to tele-consultation ensured that mental counseling for people suffering from this condition could continue. Psychiatry, on the other hand, is a therapeutic field in which patients, whether young and elderly, still prefer to meet their therapist or psychiatrist in person. One has no choice but to adapt to tele-psychiatric consultations due to the pandemic. Aside from the discomfort with using technology as reported by

most elderly patients, many feel skeptical interacting remotely with their therapist or psychiatrist in their rooms, rather than in-person consultations, due to the risk of privacy being breached in the middle of a session from outside the room. However, things are moving in the right direction, and telemedicine will continue to be a game changer for decades to come.

To summarize, telemedicine is the next big change in Indian healthcare, which will supplement existing healthcare systems and address issues of patient well-being. The payer-provider as well as physician-patient arrangement must be proficiently managed to ensure that the potential of telemedicine is fully realized over the next decade.

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