

While in-person visits to patients receiving hospice or palliative care continue to be the gold standard for service delivery, there are times when telehealth visits may be considered. It may be appropriate to offer telehealth in lieu of in-person visits in circumstances when the agency is managing environmental emergencies, following safety protocol, attempting to improve efficiency, providing increased patient access, or trying to reduce clinician burnout.

Preparing for a Telehealth Visit

- Pre-screen patients before scheduling telehealth visit
 - Does the patient have the appropriate technology to support a telehealth visit?
 - Is the patient able to use the telehealth technology, or will they have a caregiver present to assist them?
 - What training will the patient and caregiver need prior to the first telehealth visit?
 - Will the patient or caregiver require translation or other assistive services that you need to arrange in advance?
- Clinician training
 - Ensure that you've been trained in the agency's preferred telehealth platform.
 - Test for any connectivity or related issues ahead of the telehealth visit.
 - Do you know who to call if you have connectivity or other technological issues?
- Consider whether the visit is appropriate for telehealth.
 - Visits requiring in-depth physical assessments, following changes in condition, falls, or other safety concerns, and death verifications should be made in person.
 - Routine follow-ups and reassessments are typically more appropriate for telehealth visits.
- Scheduling telehealth visits
 - Leave sufficient time between visits to allow for troubleshooting issues, completing documentation, and attending to your own personal needs.
 - Avoid scheduling telehealth visits during mealtimes for patients residing in facilities.
 - If the patient requires a caregiver to be present to manage the telehealth technology, schedule for a time when the caregiver can be present. Ensure that appropriate legal representatives are present for the visit and that related authorization documentation has been completed
 - If a patient or caregiver requests the telehealth visit be recorded, ensure that you are following relevant agency policies and state laws.
 - Follow agency visit protocol to schedule visits ahead of time – do not call to schedule immediate telehealth visits unless requested by the patient or family.
- Telehealth services should be provided by audio/visual means whenever possible
 - Audio-only may be acceptable in certain circumstances as allowable by agency policy.
- Clinician appearance
 - Ensure that you are dressed appropriately and according to agency policy.
 - You should be seated in an environment that is free from distractions and provides an opportunity for private discussion. Consider what will be visible and audible to the patient and caregiver (e.g., noise, background distractions, etc.)
 - Avoid eating or chewing gum during the telehealth visit.

Privacy Considerations

- Adherence to HIPAA compliance is imperative during telehealth visits.
 - Verify that only those who the patient has permitted to join the visit are present in the room. If others, including family members, will be joining the visit, request and document verbal consent from the patient before proceeding with the visit.
 - If your agency has additional documentation requirements for telehealth visits (e.g., communication waivers or additional consents), ensure that they've been completed prior to the visit.
- Headphones are recommended, both to ensure patient privacy and for better sound quality.

Completing the Visit

- Join the visit ahead of the patient, with enough time to ensure appropriate connectivity and any required platform updates have been completed.
 - Consider technology settings that allow the patient to stay in a virtual waiting room until you invite them to join.
 - Do you know your agency protocol for missed telehealth or "no-show" visits?
- Prepare to pivot to an in-person visit if concerns arise during the telehealth visit
 - If you identify patient safety issues, significant unmanaged symptoms or distress, poor connectivity, or difficulty communicating, you should discontinue the telehealth visit and make an in-person visit.
- Ensure that you are familiar with agency protocol for correctly documenting telehealth visits (i.e., selecting non-billable timesheet codes).
 - Update the patient's plan of care to reflect the reasons for using telehealth and how this plan is meeting the goals of care in a safe and appropriate manner.

Agency Customization

Use this space to include IT support phone number, specific telehealth platform troubleshooting tips, agency telehealth protocol/policy reminders, etc.