

Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk produced by SBH Health System and broadcast, from the beautiful studios of St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx. I'm Steven Clark. From the common cold to a stroke, Telemedicine is helping to diagnose and treat patients. The American Medical Association says nearly 75% of all doctors, urgent care, and emergency room visits could be handled safely and effectively over a phone or a TV monitor presently an estimated 7 million people use Telehealth services and one study says 82% of Millennials would rather have a telemedicine visit than an in-person consult. Insurance companies are also listening, 48 states are now requiring Telehealth coverage and insurance plans and more than half of all hospitals are said to be in the process of setting up Telehealth programs, with us today to discuss telemedicine is Dr. Jitendra Barmecha, Senior VP and Chief Information Officer at SBH Health System. Welcome Dr. Barmecha.

Thank you Steve.

So let me start out by saying, I know at one time the saying was the doctor couldn't diagnose or treat you over the telephone so come to the office that's not really the case now right?

True, and thank you for the introduction and these numbers are increasing by leaps and bounds as we speak regarding Telehealth. It's an overall digital transformation strategy for any healthcare services and as you all know the telemedicine is only one part of the Telehealth strategies for those of you that may or may not know Telehealth it's remote delivery of Health Services and clinical information using telecommunication technologies.

So let's talk to the layperson what does telemedicine look like?

It comes in different flavors, so one is a synchronous telemedicine that means you are speaking or viewing images at the same time or in real-time and the second one is the asynchronous. So what you do is you store the images or you store the film and then you forward it to the relevant practitioners, so that is called asynchronous and the third one is it's a direct-to-consumer that means you are in your home or nursing homes or long-term care facilities you have sensors placed on you or near you so that we can check your vitals and other clinical signs.

Is the future happening today or are we still a few years away?

Actually, it is happening today as we speak.

Okay, and what technologies are supporting or enabling this to happen that couldn't have happened I don't know 5 to 10 years ago?

Electronic health records, digitization of the medical records, use of Internet, and use of 3G, 4G, or maybe a new era 185g wireless and Wi-Fi capabilities.

Why are we moving in this direction?

There are several reasons. It's a consumer driven health care and as we are moving forward to value-based care and access to care which is a huge issue for certain specialties for primary care I think they will narrow the gap and bend the cost curve.

Well, we talk about primary care but what specialty services also are or shortly will be available through telemedicine.

Also, currently they are available and in our patient population there is a huge issue regarding the behavioral health and using Telepsychiatry or notably and psychotherapy even TelaDietitian. They can actually close the gap.

Are patients resisting this or are they jumping to the opportunity of doing this?

Majority of the patients are very happy they have easier access to the providers they need they don't have to wait they don't have to travel and they do not have to take time out from their work there are more advantages I see with the use of these technology related healthcare services.

I guess also there's the frustration patients feel when they make an appointment they're told it's gonna take 2 or 3 or 4 weeks to see the doctor right?

Correct, and it's also helpful for the providers I mean there are so many white spaces in your scheduling and there is no show so to bridge the gap it's beneficial to both patients and providers actually.

Now you're a physician as well as a CIO so you see the benefits from both perspectives right?

Absolutely, as I said for the betterment of the community and the patients and also for the bottom line it's a win-win situation.

I saw one survey that said today less than 10 percent of Americans are presently using Telehealth services is this the lack of knowledge a fear of the unknown a lack of accessibility all of the above none of the above.

So it's multifactorial actually as you said it's a fear and it's not personalized but there are other issues for example licensing issues the payers issues but those things have come a long way actually even in New York State. Almost all payers now pay for telemedicine or Telehealth services including public programs like Medicaid Medicare Advantage and an employer based program. These second challenges where the what we call it website manners or education to providers how do we integrate these type of technologies into our clinical workflow so it's educational issues regarding the providers and as I mentioned regarding the payers and also for the patients who feel that one-to-one is more beneficial but I think once you start using these services both the providers and the patients we realize how easy and how helpful it is.

Should patients worry that medicine is going to lose the, you know the personal touch?

Absolutely no, if it is done in a fully integrated way using the appropriate technologies for the right patients at the right time using electronic health records I think it is a complimentary.

Okay, but it's not gonna happen overnight I mean it's still it's gonna happen gradually over time right.

Absolutely, there are some early adopters and they are still trying to figure it out how they are going to disseminate or assimilate into their clinical flow. It will definitely take some time.

Ten years from now a decade from now what is it gonna look like I mean are we talking about having telemedicine as sort of the go-to?

I think Telehealth as a whole as I said about telemedicine is a part of Telehealth strategies will become mainstream I predict that more than 80% of the ambulatory care visits will be through telemedicine also the subspecialty care between the providers and providers or use of other emerging technologies like robotics or robots they will be part of the mainstream healthcare

delivery in this country.

Is telemedicine going to become the house call of tomorrow?

Absolutely, yeah.

Okay, so it's really it's an evolution.

Yes.

Is there a concern that healthcare may become more fragmented as a result?

Not really, actually if it is done in a right way integrating your electronic health record and with member education or patient education and provider education it will become part of our day-to-day healthcare practices.

You know we talk about concerns or potential concerns that patients may feel what about providers do you get pushback from doctors here at SBH health system?

Absolutely. There are definitely concerns about the providers or those who are working in this geographic location because the now the services will be anywhere in 50 contiguous states you can visit your subspecialty or other services you don't need a bricks-and-mortar type of clinical services for particular use cases.

So really medicine healthcare is in some ways going the direction of Finance I guess you know where you don't need a bank on every corner right it's really amazing that we've reached this point and you feel that medicine diagnosis treatment we actually be enhanced

Absolutely it would be complementary and now again just a word of caution not all diagnosis can be made through telemedicine there are some particular use cases minor ailments or urgent type of cases or video consultation with the subspecialty so there are definitely some use cases it will not be the only solution but it will be a complementary solutions for our healthcare services.

Is there a concern that telemedicine can take us too far?

Not really actually.

So you're really 100% advocate to move in this direction?

I'm very optimistic and if you look at the employer-based insurance programs they are covering 100% these days so definitely there is value to patients providers even payers actually and more and more telemedicine which we didn't discuss now is coming in to medical education as well so you can educate two different modalities of our future doctors or nurses or allied professionals through this technology.

You're talking to residents and medical students about what medicine is going to look like when they become attendings, and all the doctors, senior doctors?

Absolutely, actually a couple of years ago American Association of medical colleges have revised their curriculum for medical students to incorporate digital health and telemedicine into their curriculum and so forth the residency programs as well.

So this is really exciting.

Yes.

I mean we're actually seeing perhaps the greatest evolution over a very short period of time in medicine that we have in the past right I mean this sort of like fits in there with some of the you know the discovery of penicillin or something over the years and the fact that's really changing the face of medicine and what we've known and we've grown accustomed to over the years right?

It's beneficial to all the stakeholders that's why it is being adopted very quickly and very fast and as we move towards value-based care there will be more and more use cases that providers will be happy patients will be satisfied pairs are looking to decrease their cost or bending the cost curve I think it's beneficial to everyone all the stakeholders

And that will happen in the Bronx?

Absolutely.

In a not too distant future?

Stay tuned.

Okay, Dr. Barmecha, thank you very much. That's all we have time for today and thank you for joining us in SBH Bronx Health Talk for more information on services available SBH visit www.sbhny.org and thank you until next time