

## Plotting the Telehealth Market Spectrum

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*By Zachary Bujnoch, Industry Manager, Patient Monitoring & Telemedicine, Frost & Sullivan*

When defining anything in the emergent market of telehealth and consumer-centric medicine, a key step is identifying a business plan or strategy on the telehealth spectrum that ranges from very clinical, diagnostic applications to consumer facing wellness solutions. Tiers along this spectrum have been forming for years, but never have they been as critically important as they are now for the telehealth space. In reference to patient outcomes, clinical telehealth is an aspect of healthcare that most developed countries handle decently well albeit not always at the best cost or with great efficiency. An example of the extreme end of this spectrum would be the highly acute hospital setting. Here, telehealth is used to replace or add to existing clinical services that plan to diagnose and/or treat patients. These services are typically highly customized and regulated, and the scrutiny of information and outcomes is quite high. On the complete opposite end of the spectrum, is the world of consumer telehealth, which is heavily focused on the wellness and preventive aspect of healthcare. Typically less skilled healthcare personnel or consumers themselves run these services. Unlike the clinical side, these services and products are more standardized and less regulated, with ease of use being paramount. Many market opportunities fall somewhere between clinical applications and wellness applications with areas that can be plotted along the spectrum that vary as you move around according to technical ability, cost, size of user demographic and customer groups, regulatory stringency, status of FDA approval, etc. Understanding where your product or service is or should be moving toward on this spectrum is a key starting point in telehealth offerings.

### **Cost and Logistics Issues to Consider in the U.S. Telehealth Market**

Telehealth markets in the U.S. can be quite complex, and it's important to look at some key issues to set the stage. While telehealth services have recently shown some very encouraging outcomes in the U.S., cost concerns are much more tricky to address and must be handled carefully. In addition, key to the complexity of providing telehealth services within the U.S. healthcare system is the country's inherent size and complexity, both geographically and demographically. Yet that's what makes telehealth so compelling - it has the potential to bridge the gap that currently exists in many of our siloed healthcare systems. Along with current healthcare information technology programs, telehealth care helps conserve healthcare resources and discourage frivolous and wasteful practices. Finally, payment is a critical issue in this space and obtaining direct reimbursement for such complex, customizable products and services has proven to be slow and complicated.

### **Three Key Aspects of the Healthcare System and How They Impact Telehealth**

When looking at where telehealth is going, it's important to keep in mind three aspects of healthcare – Diagnostic, Biological, and Behavior - , how they are evolving, the way healthcare is practiced, and how they relate to telehealth:

The first and most recognizable for most of us is the Diagnostic portion of healthcare. Within telehealth, it's where many of the already established markets are based. This is what current healthcare typically already does quite well - some examples would be diagnostic ECGs and sleep apnea along with certain aspects of home healthcare.

The Biological portion is another key component in functional healthcare systems, and while the opportunities for this aspect are more limited in telehealth, there are some telehealth applications. Some examples are the growing number of home diagnostics - tests like the well-established self glucose monitoring market, emergent tests like coagulation monitoring and even more emerging things like genetic profiles.

Last and arguably, the most important aspect going forward is Behavior, likely to be the greatest area of healthcare transformation with current unhealthy habits and significant physiological disorders like depression plaguing the U.S. behaviorally. In medicine, this is becoming increasingly important to keeping people healthy. Some key examples are: community-based healthcare, social networking, activity monitoring and health coaching.

### **The Rise of Consumer Oriented Healthcare**

Consumer-oriented healthcare ties in with the behavioral aspect of healthcare. As with many things, this concept is by no means new (with many examples, i.e. Weight Watchers). Consumer-oriented healthcare can encompass all current aspects of telehealth from remote vital signs monitoring to video Telepresence solutions to medication adherence and management. A good example of the increasing importance of this aspect of healthcare is that wellness anonymities is one of the fastest growing consumer product segments in the U.S. Some market examples include: mobile screening, patient portals, activity monitors, health coaching, and various community/social networking groups.

Consumer-oriented healthcare is all about enabling; the motivation is almost always there in some way, but it's the enabling or ability aspect that's typically lacking. Keeping things simple can help because it enables small successes instead of big failures.

The way information is presented is also key. To use an example, having access to nutritional information in restaurants did not significantly influence eating habits; one theory is that caloric information is not easily understood by the general population. Similar issues are present in healthcare environments and management of information perception is important. In some situations, consumers will give oodles of information willingly, so not only is the actual management of information security important, but also the perception of this information exchange. Finally, quite possibly the most important aspect of consumer-oriented healthcare is the integration with social networking. Why? It is because healthcare behavior change is highly linked to personal social interactions.

### **Market Opportunities Will Emerge Out of the Need for Greater Individual Responsibility**

So what does this new world of information availability and access mean for healthcare and the constantly evolving telehealth world? We have reached a critical point in healthcare system development where providing good outcomes at acceptable costs is proving increasingly difficult for healthcare providers alone. The shift of information access to the average patient and consumer comes with a natural increase in responsibility. More people take charge of their own healthcare than ever before, but even more important is that more people have to take charge of their healthcare for our system to sustain itself. Therefore, the critical question is: are enough of us taking charge of our health to survive this brave new healthcare world?

*Zachary Bujnoch can be reached at [zachary.bujnoch@frost.com](mailto:zachary.bujnoch@frost.com)*