

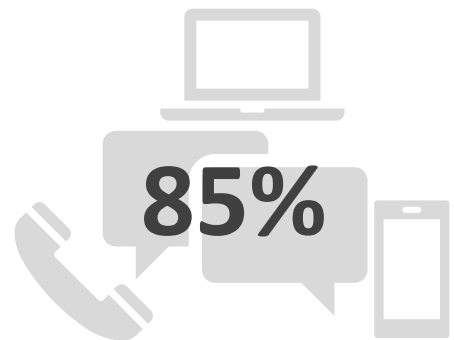
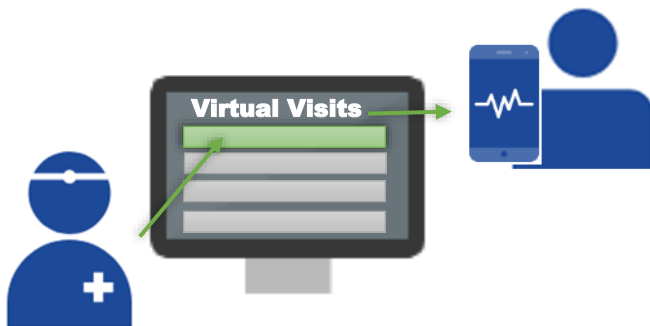
Virtual Visits: A case study on the use and benefits of provider-initiated virtual visits

Virtual visits can be integrated into primary care workflows as a complement to existing models of care, providing primary care providers another option to interact with, follow up with and monitor patients, promoting a more patient-centric approach to health care.

Virtual visit technologies **enable two-way, digital communication** between healthcare providers and their patients, allowing a healthcare professional to conduct a visit with their patient virtually through secure asynchronous messaging, and/or synchronous* audio or video conferencing.¹ Virtual visits have shown promising results in supporting patient-centered health care¹, providing convenient access to care that meets patient needs, especially for those who experience barriers to accessing care, such as those in remote geographic locations, those with mobility issues or busy lifestyles that make it challenging to access the care they need when they need it.

To support primary care across Waterloo Wellington, in March 2018, the eHealth Centre of Excellence in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network initiated the deployment of a virtual care solution. Primary care engagement in the development of the solution illustrated the need to facilitate **provider-initiated virtual visits**, to further optimize the use and benefits of this solution for patient concerns that may not require an in-person visit with a primary care provider.

Currently, **1 in 4** virtual visits are **initiated by primary care providers**



of primary care providers (n=48) initiated a virtual visit with their patients who are registered for virtual visits

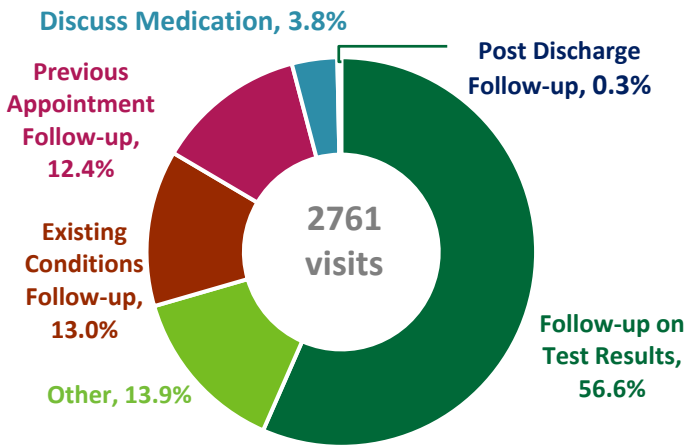
*Synchronous communication occurs simultaneously in real-time, while asynchronous communication occurs at any time and at irregular intervals.

"I often use a virtual visit to follow-up with a patient regarding test results. It only takes me a few minutes, and helps to keep my schedule open to see more acute or complex issues. Virtual care really helps with patient care, satisfaction and access, without a lot of work on my part. Day by day it is becoming a larger part of my practice."

Dr. Anil Maheshwari, Grandview Medical Centre

Virtual visits enable primary care providers to provide care for a variety of appointment types that are suitable for virtual care. Figure 1 below illustrates the **appointment reasons for which a provider initiated a virtual visit** with their patient.

Figure 1. Reasons for provider-initiated virtual visits



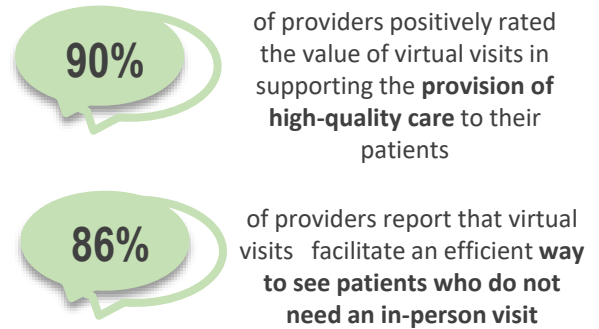
Provider-initiated virtual visits were most beneficial for following up on a patient’s test results, existing conditions, previous appointment and/or discussing medications. The results highlight the ease of using virtual visits for a wide variety of suitable appointment types and efficiently communicating with patients who may not require an in-person visit.

Although currently listed as less than one percent (1%) of visits, **post discharge follow-up is one of the primary care priority indicators for quality.**² Virtual visits provided primary care providers with another option to conveniently reach patients and facilitate effective transitions through different levels of care as part of the patient’s circle of care.

Understandably, hospital discharges are less frequent than other patient care needs illustrating the low proportion of virtual visits for this purpose, as compared to other reasons.

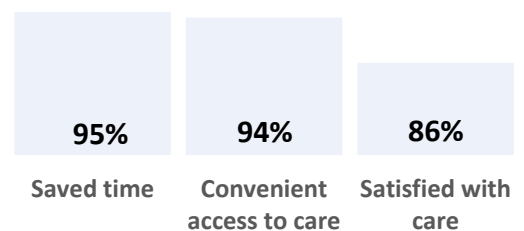
In addition, primary care providers have indicated positive feedback on integrating virtual visits within their patient care workflows (Figure 2) while also promoting a patient-centric approach to care as illustrated in the feedback received by patients (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Provider experience (n=21)



Patients who had received virtual visit requests from their primary care provider also indicated positive feedback, noting the time saved, convenience and the satisfaction with the care received.

Figure 3. Patient experience with virtual visits initiated by primary care provider (N=116)



If you have any questions or would like further information on this case study, contact communications@ehealthce.ca.

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Works Cited:

- McGrail, K. M., Ahuja, M. A., & Leaver, C. A. (2017). Virtual Visits and Patient-Centered Care: Results of a Patient Survey and Observational Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 19(5), e177. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.7374>
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