

Fast-Forward 5 Years: Topol on the Future of Patient Care

Eric J. Topol, MD | April 11, 2014

Hi. This is Eric Topol, Editor-in-Chief of Medscape. Today I want to talk about about office visits of the future.

The idea of "virtual" office visits replacing physically present office visits has been moving at a pace that is quite astounding. The February 2014 issue of *Health Affairs* was dedicated to this idea of telemedicine, telehealth, and the use of mobile devices in medicine. An article by Robert Pearl^[1] from Kaiser Permanente included an interesting graph about the growth of virtual visits – and we are not even talking about video, but email and phone visits as compared with physical office visits. The graph showed how the virtual visit has taken off during the past 5 years, and that is even without technology.

Now we have doctors on demand. We have Ringadoc and all these other services, in addition to being able to go to the "clinic" at your corner drug store for medical advice, whether it is CVS, Walgreens, or Walmart.

Cisco surveyed several thousand Americans^[2] who were representative of the country, and 74% did not want to physically go for an office visit. They preferred a virtual visit. They do not want to wait an hour for a 7-minute face-to-face visit; they would rather have this visit in the comfort of wherever they are, at home or on-the-go, and have this visit via secure video or another type of communication.

What is also interesting is that we can use tools that we did not have before: smartphones to do an ear exam, an eye exam; to transmit all of the metrics, like blood pressure, heart rhythm, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation – right in the midst of the virtual visit.

If you fast-forward over the next 5 years, we will be doing a lot of office visits in a completely different way, and whether they are telephone consults or video links with transmission of the data in real time or in advance, it is a whole different look, so we should be getting ready for the virtual physician visit with patients in the years ahead. Thanks for your attention.

References

1. Pearl R. Kaiser Permanente Northern California: current experiences with internet, mobile, and video technologies. *Health Aff.* 2014;33:251-257.
2. Cisco study reveals 74 percent of consumers open to virtual doctor visit. The Network: Cisco's Technology News Site. March 4, 2013. <http://newsroom.cisco.com/press-release-content?articleId=1148539> Accessed March 13, 2014.

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