

# Understanding Telehealth and Telemedicine

The utilization of technology to connect patients and health care providers remotely has significantly increased as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Telehealth, the remote method to receive health care, can encompass a wide range of technological modalities, including video visits, phone calls and online communication.

This technology can be beneficial for patients with lymphoma as an important supplement addition to standard in-person care, by providing opportunities for patients to stay engaged with their healthcare providers, even in times of reduced access to the healthcare system (due to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance, or other limitations).

## TERMINOLOGY

While both terms refer to remote interactions between you and your healthcare team, telehealth is different from telemedicine in that it includes a broader scope of services:

- **Telehealth** refers to the use of remote technologies to support long-distance clinical and non-clinical services. It includes healthcare, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration.
- **Telemedicine** refers specifically to the use of electronic communications and information technologies to provide clinical services when participants are at different locations.

## TYPES OF TELEHEALTH

You can get many types of care through telehealth, which can be in real-time (*synchronous telehealth*—video and audio calls) or stored for future reference or response (*asynchronous telehealth*—emails, text messages, images, and lab results). Check with your doctor's office to see what services you may be able to get from home. Most technologies used in telehealth only require that you have a phone or a mobile device with internet access. Although the required bandwidth will depend on the software you are using, access to a high-speed internet and reliable connection is often needed for synchronous telehealth. **Technologies used in telehealth include the following:**

- **Mobile health (mHealth):** refers to the use of apps on mobile devices (smartphones, tablets or laptops). Patients can use mHealth apps to track health measurements, set medication and appointment reminders, schedule appointments, and share information with their doctor.

- **Video and audio technologies:** conferencing technology has been traditionally used to provide care for inmates, military personnel, and patients located in rural settings. High resolution cameras can be used to improve the quality of the diagnosis.
- **Remote patient monitoring (RPM):** refers to reporting, collection, transmission, and evaluation of patient health data through wearables (electronic devices worn as accessories or embedded in clothing), mobile devices, smartphone apps, and internet-enabled computers. RPM devices collect and transfer vital sign data including blood pressures, cardiac stats, oxygen levels, and respiratory rates.
- **Store and forward technologies:** capture, storage, and transmittal of patient health information for asynchronous healthcare delivery (data is collected and delivered at different times). Computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging scans, X-rays, photos, videos, and text-based patient data are gathered and sent to your doctor, who evaluates the data and assists in your treatment.

## BEST PRACTICES SPECIFIC TO THE LYMPHOMA COMMUNITY

Telehealth can be a valuable support to standard of care practices for patients with lymphoma. It provides a flexible platform for check-ups and follow-up visits, where your doctor can monitor any existing comorbidities or new symptoms you might have. It can also be used to get a second opinion with another specialist, to confirm your diagnosis and evaluate if the course of treatment is the most appropriate for your type of lymphoma. Check with your insurance provider to ensure coverage before connecting with an out-of-state specialist via telehealth.

### **Your doctor will assess the risk and evaluate if telehealth is the best option for you:**

- Telehealth may be a good option to avoid traveling long distances for follow-up visits in patients who are controlled.
- Telehealth is not suitable if you have an emergency and require physical examination or acute medical intervention.

It is important that your doctor discuss these limitations and presents suitable alternatives when physical presence is irreplaceable.

### **When your virtual appointment is coming up, you can take steps to make sure everything runs smoothly:**

- Known location with internet access and that is private.
- Choose a well-lit, quiet and comfortable place.
- List all the questions and concerns you have for your doctor.
- Write down any health conditions or symptoms you might have and medications you are taking.
- Confirm which technology you will need for your appointment and if all devices are working properly.
- Talk clearly and make sure your doctor can hear you.
- Let your provider know if you have trouble hearing or seeing them.

To learn more about how to prepare in advance for your telehealth appointment, view the *Telehealth Best Practices* fact sheet on Lymphoma Research Foundation's (LRF) website.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Telehealth providers must protect any private health information disclosed during your appointment. Your private health information is protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which also applies to the provision of telehealth services. **Prior to your appointment, consider the following aspects:**

- Find a private location where you feel comfortable disclosing sensitive information.
- Use encrypted platforms to communicate with your doctor.
- If passwords are required, do not disclose them to third parties.
- If you have any privacy concerns, ask your doctor about the apps they use at their office and if they comply with HIPAA guidelines.

### **TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

**Consider the following technical aspects of your telemedicine appointment ahead of schedule to ensure you are able to maximize your time with your health care provider:**

- Are you going to use your phone, tablet or computer for the visit?
- Is the device fully charged or plugged in?
- Do you have a reliable internet connection?
- Test any links your doctor's office sent you to ensure they are working correctly and that you can log in to their platforms

- Does your health system use an app for telehealth visits? If so, download it in advance.
- Make sure you have a comfortable place to sit for the visit and that your camera gives a clear view of you for the provider.
- Close all apps you do not need to eliminate distractions.
- If you are using a phone your arm may get tired, so make arrangements to steady it on the table with props.
- Have paper and a pen ready to take notes during the call.

If you experience technical issues, double check that your device is charged/plugged in and your internet connection is stable. If the telehealth platform is web-based, make sure your internet browser is updated. If the issues do not resolve, try restarting your device, connecting with a different device or reaching out to your doctor's office for assistance.

### **INSURANCE CONCERNS**

The telehealth services available at your doctor's office may have a cost, depending on the type of service provided. These costs may be covered by your insurance. **Before your appointment, be sure to check with your insurance provider to learn about your options:**

- Check with your doctor's office to see if the telehealth service they are providing has a cost.
- Consult your health plan and see if it covers telehealth — if so, what services it includes, and what your out-of-pocket costs might be.
- If you have Medicaid, check directly with your state Medicaid office (coverage of telehealth services is different for each state).
- If you have Medicare, click **here** to find a list of services covered for telehealth.

If you don't have insurance, click **here** to find health centers near you that offer telehealth. Check with the provider's office to see what services are offered and what your cost would be.

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL**

- Do you offer telehealth as an option for a visit?
- If it is offered, what types of visit could be telehealth?
- Does my insurance cover such a visit?
- Is there a certain app that you use?

### **RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THOSE WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY**

While telehealth can help to overcome barriers to cancer care such as travelling, lack of paid sick leave and childcare needs, limited access to electronic devices (e.g., phones, tablets, computers), poor connectivity and low tech literacy can create new barriers.

Telehealth technology that requires several steps (download, registration and login) may be complicated for some patients. In addition, approximately one-quarter of American adults do not have broadband internet service at home, and socioeconomic factors also play a role in determining accessibility of broadband service at home. As a result, telehealth may not be feasible for some people. It is important that you let your doctor's office know if you have limited access to internet or electronic resources. **Your doctor's office can help with any barriers to utilizing telehealth:**

- If you live in a remote area, your doctor can help you identify virtual programs and support networks for cancer care.
- If you have trouble navigating telehealth apps, your doctor can choose apps that send you a text message with a direct link to connect to the video call.
- An alternative method to video calls is to make use of free or low-cost web-based tools.
- If the connection is not steady, your doctor can use store-and-forward technologies where the communication between you and your provider does not happen in real time.
- If you are unable to connect to the internet, you can still access telehealth care with audio-visits.

## LRF'S HELPLINE AND LYMPHOMA SUPPORT NETWORK

A lymphoma diagnosis often triggers a range of feelings and concerns. In addition, cancer treatment can cause physical discomfort. The LRF Helpline staff members are available to answer your general questions about a lymphoma diagnosis and treatment information, as well as provide individual support and referrals to you and your loved ones. Callers may request the services of a language interpreter. A part of the Helpline is LRF's one-to-one peer support programs, *Lymphoma Support Network*. This program connects patients and caregivers with volunteers who have experience with lymphomas, similar treatments, or challenges, for mutual emotional support and encouragement. You may find this useful whether you or a loved one is newly diagnosed, in treatment, or in remission.

LRF appreciates the expertise and review of our **medical reviewers:**

**Lori Leslie, MD**  
John Theurer Cancer Center at  
Hackensack Meridian

Contact LRF:

Helpline: (800) 500-9976

Email: [helpline@lymphoma.org](mailto:helpline@lymphoma.org)

[www.lymphoma.org](http://www.lymphoma.org)

## MOBILE APP

*Focus On Lymphoma* is the first mobile application (app) that provides patients and caregivers comprehensive content based on their lymphoma subtype and tools to help manage their lymphoma such as, keep track of medications and blood work, track symptoms, and document treatment side effects. The *Focus On Lymphoma* mobile app is available for download for iOS and Android devices in the Apple App Store and Google Play. For additional information on the mobile app, visit [FocusOnLymphoma.org](http://FocusOnLymphoma.org). To learn more about any of these resources, visit our website at [lymphoma.org](http://lymphoma.org), or contact the LRF Helpline at 800-500-9976 or [helpline@lymphoma.org](mailto:helpline@lymphoma.org).

## Resources

LRF offers a wide range of free resources that address treatment options, the latest research advances, and ways to cope with all aspects of lymphoma and CLL/SLL including our award-winning mobile app. LRF also provides many educational activities, including our in-person meetings, podcasts, webinars for people with lymphoma, as well as patient guides and e-Updates that provide the latest disease-specific news and treatment options. To learn more about any of these resources, visit our website at [www.lymphoma.org](http://www.lymphoma.org), or contact the LRF Helpline at (800) 500-9976 or [helpline@lymphoma.org](mailto:helpline@lymphoma.org).

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