Urgent Care Virtualization

A three-step implementation strategy for building and
growing an scalable Urgent Care Virtualization program

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Recap and Introduction

Published in Nov. 2016, "7 Ways to Start Your Telemedicine Program" outlines how to use telemedicine to expand care delivery pathways that bring healthcare closer to the patient, while creating a viable revenue stream. In our first in-depth whitepaper, we dove into the benefits of using telemedicine to build or enhance a Chronic Care Management program.

Advancing Chronic Care Management with Telemedicine

A five-step implementation strategy for building an effective and lasting CCM program.

What Is Urgent Care Virtualization?

In our second in-depth analysis, we focus on virtualizing an urgent care / emergency medicine system. We demonstrate how a virtual urgent care system is the most convenient option for patients seeking immediate care.

Brick and mortar urgent care centers, as well as clinics located at national retail chains, offer convenient healthcare to patients wanting to avoid visiting an emergency room.

Virtual urgent care offers patients the convenience of not having to travel to any urgent care center or clinic, and allows health systems to use physicians, advanced practitioners, and telemedicine vendors to staff the visits.

Determining the right implementation approach requires that a health system review their healthcare delivery and business objectives. Once an approach is finalized, health systems must focus on three processes to build an effective virtual urgent care platform:

Provider Coverage Optimization
Guarantee 24/7 coverage to urgent care services.

Continuity of Care
Help patients transition between care settings and engage with their treatment.

Marketing
Achieve immediate buy-in and lasting support from your providers and patients.

What is Urgent Care and How is it Impacting Your Health System?

In our initial whitepaper, we previewed urgent care virtualization and explained it as a "microcosm of a proliferation of consumer-facing healthcare."

Your health system is likely no stranger to urgent care. Many health systems directly compete with other affiliated urgent care clinics, and many of you have built or acquired your own urgent care centers to compete with them and with retail clinics. The impetus being to find a competitive advantage that allows the nearest proximity to the patient.

We respect the business motivations to mobilize and build urgent care centers. Yet, a brick and mortar setup still restricts patients to an in-person encounter.

Integrating telemedicine into your health system lets you circumvent the in-person obstacle and bring trained physicians and qualified health personnel to a patient's desktop, kitchen table, or couch through a personal computer or mobile device.

The Evolution of Consumer-Facing Healthcare
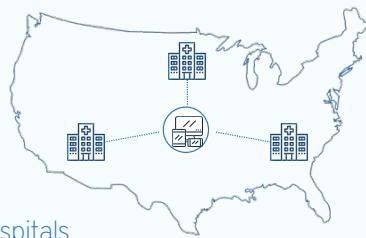
Hospitals

The hospital and clinic remain the mainstay for diagnosis and treatment. Telemedicine connects patients in a rural clinic to a primary care physician in a city hospital, connects a primary care physician at that city hospital to a specialist located across the country, and sends MRI images to a radiologist working remotely.
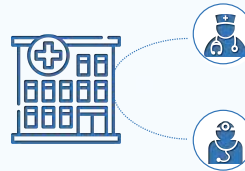
Urgent Care Clinics

Urgent care clinics treat patients requiring immediate attention. Telemedicine providers can treat many injuries and conditions without the need for a patient to see a provider in-person. Visiting with a virtual provider allows patients to obtain an immediate expert opinion on treatment next steps.

CareClix Urgent Care Module

The CareClix Urgent Care Virtualization module brings telemedicine-enabled urgent care to a more comprehensive level. We use our care coordination processes built into our CareClix Anywhere program, including medical device integration and integrated staff models, to care for the patient through and beyond the actual visit. We supplement provider staffs and optimize workflows and help you market a telemedicine solution.

Research demonstrates a trend toward convenience as the single greatest factor influencing a patient's decision on where and how to obtain care. Convenience is what often dictates a destination, and health systems need to alter their care delivery platforms to bring healthcare closer to patients.

In a survey of almost 4,000 healthcare consumers, the Advisory Board Company found that convenient access to care was the primary attribute to deciding on a healthcare destination. Making healthcare more convenient aligns with efforts to lower health system costs and add new revenue.[1]

How Telemedicine Advances Economic Objectives and Improves Healthcare Outcomes of Urgent Care

Telemedicine both advances and changes the current urgent care paradigm. Primarily, telemedicine improves healthcare outcomes by changing how and when patients see doctors. According to a JAMA study, "more than half of all clinic, urgent care, and ER visits could be handled safely and effectively over the phone or video."[2] Telemedicine may also grant patients the option to see their own provider rather than whoever is staffing an urgent care center or emergency department.

There are economic objectives that align with telemedicine implementation as well. Health systems can find cost savings – "at UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center) $86.64 is saved on average every time a patient receives primary care or urgent care online versus going to an ER or urgent care clinic."[3] We continue to hear from our clients and partners that investing in telemedicine might have started as a reaction against a changing healthcare delivery landscape, but it has turned into a proactive solution that enhances their position in the market in the near- and long-term future.

If a patient's health system were to align with CareClix for example, the health system may use their own physicians and nurses to staff virtual urgent care visits. This adds a level of comfort for patients that brick and mortar clinics can't copy.

How Telemedicine Advances Economic Objectives and Improves Healthcare Outcomes of Urgent Care

The following concepts should govern how you approach your healthcare and economic objectives when assessing implementation of urgent care virtualization. After using these concepts to assess your organization's readiness for virtual urgent care, the next section demonstrates how to build an effective platform.

Healthcare Outcomes

Care Coordination

Utilize urgent care virtualization to keep your patients in your network. Use your expanded care delivery options to gather more patient-level data and help coordinate their care.

Patient Satisfaction

Improve patient satisfaction by offering a more convenient urgent care option that doesn't require having to sit in a waiting room. Like other businesses, a health system wants to build loyalty, especially when there is greater competition from non-traditional healthcare settings.

Proactive Patients

Bring healthcare to patients to help them better engage with their own care, reduce complications from acute and chronic conditions, and increase cost savings for your health system. The convenience and monitoring ability of telemedicine supports health systems efforts to keep patients out of the hospital.

How Telemedicine Advances Economic Objectives and Improves Healthcare Outcomes of Urgent Care

Having these concepts at hand will help you prioritize among your health system's goals and better understand how telemedicine can extend your telemedicine care delivery strategies.

Economic Outcomes
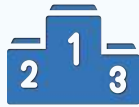
Competitive Analysis

Plan for future care delivery transformations by integrating telemedicine into your short- and long-term competitive strategies. Urgent care virtualization is an entry point into telemedicine that requires less startup costs than more extensive telemedicine integrations.

Health systems can immediately compete against urgent care clinics and retail clinics, while using a telemedicine vendor to build a more extensive platform that integrates care coordination, staffing, and workflow management.

Cost Savings

Transition to a less costly urgent care model by replacing brick and mortar urgent care centers with inflexible staffs with a leaner and dynamic virtual urgent care staff. A telemedicine vendor's provider network may support health systems at the beginning of a virtual urgent care implementation and help them maintain 24/7 coverage.

Maximize Encounters

Increase the total number of encounters across all delivery channels to protect revenue streams and ensure patients receive the appropriate level of care. Telemedicine adds another pathway for patients to receive care. Health systems must develop strategies to triage patients to telemedicine, the emergency room, or clinic based on their conditions.

How Telemedicine-Enabled Urgent Care Can Succeed

CareClix outlined three processes that health systems must prioritize to build a successful virtual urgent care platform. These same three ideas are the foundation for our own Urgent Care Virtualization module, which is a pre-configured, yet customizable, solution that health systems may white label and implement immediately.

1. Provider Coverage Optimization

Understand how to best use your own provider staff and a telemedicine vendor's provider network to guarantee 24/7 coverage.

2. Continuity of Care

Health systems who use the CareClix virtual urgent care platform will protect their patients' continuity of care as they transition between services and engage with their treatment and take steps to prevent avoidable episodes.

3. Marketing

What differentiates CareClix is our ability to not only delivery a comprehensive technology solution, but also add custom business services to help your team implement the solution and achieve lasting adoption.

1 – Provider Coverage Optimization

Telemedicine programs can bring significant changes to the structure of your organization. Any new care delivery platform is likely to garner mistrust among providers and gain limited patient users. Implementing a telemedicine platform does not have to dramatically interfere with current provider workflows. Rather, telemedicine helps reduce time spent on administrative tasks, freeing time for revenue-generating virtual and in-person visits.

The goal of CareClix's Urgent Care Virtualization module is to generate a level of comfort with telemedicine to spur increasing usage by patients and providers.

As adoption increases, providers will have greater flexibility to see more complex patients in-person, especially if a health system uses a telemedicine vendor's provider network to supplement virtual urgent care.

Coverage is more than always having a physician available. To run an effective virtual urgent care program, health systems must have staff available to treat all conditions at all times. This is why CareClix believes that partnerships between telemedicine vendor provider networks and health system providers is vital to optimizing virtual urgent care workflows.

CareClix Tip

In the CareClix Urgent Care Virtualization module, we focus on how to guarantee access to care for patients. That entails 24/7 coverage, a hybrid approach of real-time and appointment-based visits, and protocols for information sharing between our own provider network and a health system's physicians and nurses.

2 – Continuity of Care

A problem we sought to solve with our virtual urgent care module centered on a lack of care coordination between urgent care centers and the patient's health system. We soon found that the lack of coordination extended to retail clinics. By wanting the most convenient option, patients were asking providers to treat them without the providers knowing their full medical histories.

By providing telemedicine-enabled urgent care, health systems can keep patients in their network and ensure that the patient is treated appropriately. When health systems partner with CareClix to supplement their medical staff with our provider network, we implement a secure data storage and transmission system that ensures no loss of medical data.

The CareClix platform integrates with all major electronic medical record (EMR) systems. This allows our clients to keep their current EMR and work telemedicine into their workflow.

This is a key component of all our telemedicine modules. From acute urgent care to Chronic Care Management, it is vital that providers always have updated patient information.

Information must be available in real time. Providers must be ready with up-to-date information prior to and during visits. CareClix not only integrates with EMRs, but with at-home medical devices used to treat patients with chronic conditions. We see integrated devices as a vital part of urgent care. Many patients with chronic conditions will have acute episodes that require immediate attention. Real-time data from these devices will support telemedicine providers in making critical decisions.

CareClix Tip

Coordinated urgent care does not end with the visit. CareClix understands the importance of applying care protocols to all virtual visits, including urgent care. We help our partners implement virtual urgent care using our protocols for treatment, coordination, and even virtual etiquette. Once the visit ends, all prescription and other treatment information gets relayed as necessary, including to the patient. Even the best built urgent care systems cannot succeed if the patient is not engaged.

3 – Marketing

Building a successful virtual urgent care platform requires support from your own providers and patient adoption. To drive telemedicine adoption, a health system must build awareness among providers and demonstrate the advantages of telemedicine consultations to patients. To accomplish these key aspects of telemedicine adoption, providers and patients must perceive personal benefits to telemedicine consultations as well as financial incentives.

Virtual urgent care and telemedicine in general adds convenience for patients and relieves workflow pressures for providers. Yet, virtualizing urgent care is not an idea easily consumed. Like telemedicine as a whole, health systems are weary of investing in a new form of care delivery that has struggled with adoption. Through our awareness programs built around education and training, CareClix builds an adoption strategy similar to how other businesses approach technology. Our marketing model shortcuts the typical adoption curve by building provider and patient advocates. Trainings and educational materials that explain the virtues of telemedicine, from easing provider burden to the convenience of virtual urgent care, increase a health system's ability to build a lasting program.

It is also crucial that health systems market the financial benefits of virtual urgent care. Providers can use extra time during their days or evenings to meet with patients virtually. Using a partner like CareClix will help lessen time spent on administrative tasks and coordinating care. Virtual urgent care adds a revenue stream and keeps patients loyal to the health system.

As a telemedicine vendor, we understand how to market virtual urgent care to our partners' patients and to the larger health system communities.

Our module is an entry point into telemedicine. We help merge our platform with your existing urgent care systems and capabilities to provide a solution that does not warrant large workflow changes.

Furthermore, as your health system expands to take on chronic care management, remote patient monitoring, and more, CareClix can help identify when and how to plan and market those strategies.

Work With a Telemedicine Vendor to Win at Consumer-Centric Healthcare Delivery

CareClix designed the three elements of an effective virtual urgent care platform to help health systems replace or supplement their current urgent care centers with a virtual option. These elements help overcome obstacles to implementing a platform that brings healthcare closer to the patient. Similar to other care delivery transformations, the obstacles center on technical integration with the larger health system, workflow management, internal and external communication, and care coordination. Working with a telemedicine vendor will facilitate your strategic planning and implementation.

A vendor's provider network, if available, would grant a health system the flexibility to use external providers as cover to their own physicians and practitioners to assure 24/7 patient access to virtual urgent care services. The CareClix provider network covers all primary and specialty care, and our platform integrates with all major health information technology (HIT) systems.

If you do decide to partner with a telemedicine vendor, it is important to pick a technology that works with you, but it is equally as important to find a partner that will help you build a business strategy and market your telemedicine solution to your members and community.

Virtual urgent care is an entry point into a larger telemedicine presence. As consumers demand easier and faster access to providers, a partner with the technical and business experience like CareClix will help keep you competitive in a dynamic market.

CareClix understands that many health systems will want to bring CareClix Anywhere in-house. We are the only telemedicine vendor that supports our partners as they transition from the CareClix national provider network to their own internal network of providers and administrators. At any point in the transition, you can use our provider network to expand your reach or maintain 24/7 coverage.

3 Ways to Manage Your CareClix Anywhere Program

1. Use your own physicians and administrators

2. Let CareClix manage your CCM Anywhere program

3. Let CareClix work with you to augment your program

Conclusions and Next Steps

Urgent Care Virtualization uses telemedicine to connect patients with providers via a personal computer or mobile device. The goal is to help patients realize near-instant diagnosis and treatment. Patients want convenience and virtual urgent care meets their demands better than brick and mortar urgent care centers, retail clinics, and emergency departments. Partnering with a telemedicine vendor's provider network creates a system of 24/7 coverage with the ability to cover many more healthcare conditions.

As your health system plans an entry or expansion of telemedicine capabilities, keep our strategic healthcare and business concepts in mind. Know your market, work with your providers, and cater to patient demand for convenience and quality care delivery. When CareClix partners with health systems, we offer a solution that is branded to our partner organization and geared to your targeted population of patients and providers.

After reading this guide, please feel free to contact us anytime if you would like to learn more about any of the concepts featured in this whitepaper or if you'd like to learn more about how CareClix can help your organization. We can be reached by phone anytime at 1(855) CARECLX or by email at info@careclix.com

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About CareClix

CareClix provides comprehensive, integrated telehealth applications, technology, and services that health systems can self-brand. As the only open telemedicine platform, CareClix provides out-of-the-box support for the most popular telemedicine carts, EHRs, and over 200+ medical devices. Healthline ranks CareClix as the #1 telemedicine company because we offer a seamless solution with advanced technical features and a dedicated team who helps tailor solutions to each of our clients. We've used this platform to help our customers implement telemedicine programs impacting over 4 million patients a year and counting.

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Sources

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