Workers' Comp

COVID-19 Effects on Workers' Compensation Technologies

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There is no shortage of information discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic has already changed the world as we knew it. Statista reports that the majority of Americans have significantly changed their lifestyles, with 75% reporting they're staying home more, 54% traveling less and 51% shopping online more. While some of these changes may come and go as the threat of the virus changes, there are many that we predict may stick around in a post-virus world, from companies, including insurance carriers, allowing employees to work from home permanently to major changes in the restaurant and retail industries. The workers' compensation industry, of course, is not exempt from significant changes. Over the past few months, we've already seen significant pivots from thousands of legislative and regulatory updates to a major uptick in telemedicine adoption. While it's too soon to predict which of all these changes may endure in the workers' compensation industry post-COVID, there are a few technology-related trends that already stand out.

Telemedicine

In February 2020, Mitchell surveyed industry insiders to learn more about the future of technology in the workers' compensation industry. This survey showed that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, workers' compensation professionals believed telemedicine was the technology that would have the most significant impact on the industry over the next 10 years (32%). Since the survey was conducted at the end of February, telemedicine has taken off in the midst of the pandemic. During a live workers' compensation webinar on May 14, Mitchell conducted a poll of attendees, revealing that 58% of participants' organizations were currently using telemedicine—a sharp increase from the original survey results. In another live poll during the May webinar, of those that said they are presently using telemedicine, 25% said they are currently seeing more than a 100% increase in usage. Others in the industry are reporting similar experiences—Teledoc, one of the largest suppliers of telemedicine technology, saw 2.04 million telehealth visits in the first quarter of 2020, which was nearly double the 1.06 visits in the same quarter in 2019.

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As states across the country relax COVID-19-related restrictions, we expect that telemedicine usage will continue to grow in the industry not only for treatment, but also for claim triage. Since many states passed short-term, emergency legislation to allow telemedicine for workers' compensation claims at the start of the pandemic, many legislators across the country will have to consider how or if to make those rules more permanent.

Other Workers' Compensation Technologies

In addition to telemedicine, the COVID-19 pandemic may leave other lasting impacts on how the workers' compensation industry uses technology. Here are a few additional technologies we expect may also play a bigger role in the industry moving forward.

Mobile

As more companies shift to permanent remote operations, we anticipate there may be increased adoption of mobile technologies that allow employees the flexibility to stay connected when they are out of the office. TechCrunch reported that mobile app spending is expected to double by 2024, despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote working apps are expected to lead with a large surge in app installations in 2020, with a decrease in downloads for other apps that were popular pre-pandemic like rideshare apps.

Wearables

In Mitchell's 2020 industry survey, only 6.5% of participants said wearables, such as heart-rate monitors or step tracking devices, will be the technology that has the biggest impact on the industry. As a result of the pandemic, we anticipate that wearables may become more popular in the workers' compensation industry than anticipated, as providers explore ways to stay connected with patients remotely.

Analytics

Additionally, we anticipate seeing increased interest in analytics from workers' compensation claims organizations as they track the impacts of COVID-19. Many companies will want to keep a close eye on how the pandemic is affecting return-to-work processes, including trends in access to care and other metrics to help them understand the impact on their business and workforce.

Overcoming Challenges & Looking Ahead

In the original survey, participants reported that workflow efficiency was the most pressing industry challenge before the COVID-19 crisis (27%). While many of the same pre-COVID-19 hardships still exist in the industry today, the pandemic has added a slew of new issues for claims organizations to overcome. In the May 14 live workers' compensation webinar, we ran another poll to find out more about the challenges the industry is facing today in the face of the pandemic. A majority of participants said they are most concerned with forecasting the impact of business slowdown (55%) followed by COVID-19 exposures (15%). Issues will continue to arise during the pandemic and pose unprecedented challenges to the workers' compensation industry. For those organizations that embrace these new workers' compensation technologies, they may find it easier not just to solve issues caused by the pandemic, but discover greater efficiencies and more effective operations overall.



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