Workers' Comp

# Networks Support Telemedicine for Continued Care

June 1, 2020
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**“Our offices are temporarily closed due to COVID-19.”**

This is the message many people received when contacting their doctor’s office over the past two months. While this message may not have been alarming for routine services like physicals, it quickly proved to be distressing for patients undergoing care for work comp injuries. Workers’ comp injuries are unique because they typically require face-to-face visits with medical professionals to evaluate, diagnose and treat. When a provider’s office is closed it can significantly impact an employee’s ability to return to work. As injured workers faced temporary office closures, postponed surgeries and cancelled therapy appointments, we knew that as a work comp provider network we had to be innovative and lead the charge for their care.

Enter telemedicine. Virtual exams Telemedicine provides the opportunity for patients to be virtually evaluated and treated by a medical professional from the comfort of their home, office or practically anywhere with an internet connection. While telemedicine is not new, it is just recently gaining popularity in the work comp industry as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis. In the commercial health world telemedicine has been a viable option for patient care for several years.

However, when it comes to workers’ comp and the regulatory issues associated with it, many states have not been as open to this method of care. Acting fast The COVID-19 pandemic has catapulted telemedicine adoption in workers’ comp. States that had previously looked at telemedicine as a fringe option are now rapidly accepting it. And with this new option injured workers have been able to continue their much-needed care. Prior to the pandemic only a handful of states had rules and regulations in place regarding telemedicine, while most states remained silent. Now, due to COVID-19, almost all states have either adopted emergency rules that allow telemedicine or relaxed their current rules and regulations. Some notable changes include:

- Allowing for an injured worker’s home to serve as an originating site
- Allowing for an initial visit to be conducted via telemedicine
- Relaxing HIPAA requirements for technology, which now allows for the use of common video chat applications to conduct a telemedicine visit

- Relaxing requirements for same state licensure in order to treat an injured worker
- Requiring parity in payment with an office visit

From our perspective, Coventry has seen a tremendous increase in telemedicine utilization. In February we averaged 175 telemedicine bills per day. This average increased to 230 bills per day in March, 2,500 bills per day in April and 4,700 bills per day in May - an increase of over 2,500% in just months. The ability to continue treatment for injured workers has benefited providers who are less inclined to bring patients in for routine and follow-up visits. In addition, Telerehabilitation has also been thrust into the future to help injured workers continue their rehab treatment while adhering to safety precautions and slow the spread of the virus. What remains to be seen is how states will continue with telemedicine as a part of on-going patient care once the COVID-19 crisis passes.

As we move forward into a post COVID-19 future, telemedicine should be considered as a solution to streamline injury intake, assessment and treatment to help injured workers get back to work. At Coventry we're confident that through our network efforts we will be ready to meet the need. Coventry's approach Prior to COVID-19 Coventry had offered telemedicine exclusively through our nurse triage NT24 program as a tool to assess injuries and the need for a visit. As a best in class network, we understood the need for continuation of care and decided to increase our telemedicine efforts beyond our nurse triage program. Our network team immediately started reaching out to our top providers across the country to confirm whether they had telemedicine accessibility.

The team contacted over 10,000 provider locations and updated our directories and records to reflect if a provider was telemedicine capable. These updates were critical to sharing real-time information with clients about providers who had telemedicine accessibility. Want to learn more about Telemedicine? To learn more about the benefits of telemedicine and how it can help maintain productivity, watch this two and half minute video from Tammy Bradly, Coventry's Vice President of Clinical Product Development. From The Sounding Board blog, Embracing Technology: Old School vs. New and Virtual Connections: Utilizing Technology to Build and Deepen Relationships with Injured Workers provides information on benefits to adopting telemedicine and much more.




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