



The Fascinating World of TeleMed

Is this the new version of a house call?

by LIV FUN staff

About 20 years ago a rather naive young man developed an alarming rash after clearing unwanted plants from around his house foundation. Symptoms appeared on his arms a day or two after the yard work and began to spread dramatically.

Not wanting to take the chance to wait out the infection, or whatever it was, the man set up a doctor's appointment two days after the first symptoms appeared. He had to take time off work and drive over one hour each way to the doctor's office.

After a long wait in the exam room, the doctor eventually opened the door, took one look at the rash, and before even removing his hand from the doorknob said, "That's poison ivy; you have been in some poison ivy."

He prescribed the standard treatment and sent the man on his way with instructions and assurances that all would be well again in one, maybe two weeks.

It occurred to me (yes, I was the man who had never had a poison ivy reaction in his life up to that time) on my drive out of the city that there surely had to be a more efficient way to deal with a problem like this. Couldn't the doctor have viewed a photo of the rash or, even better, conducted a live video session with a patient, drawn the same conclusion, and prescribed the same course of treatment?

It may not have saved the doctor much time, but think of the patient and how the time between the first alarm and the prescription could have been shortened.

Fast forward to this century, and companies like Telamed, Teledoc, Doctors on Demand, Virtual Visits, Virtual Clinics and more offer assistance and diagnosis via computer or smartphone from virtually anywhere on the planet. And the trend is estimated to grow at 18% per year for at least the next few years. (RNCOS, 2020)

Clearly, quick virtual access to a health professional has some real advantages.

Thinking of the simple poison ivy case, the issue could have been quickly diagnosed with a prescription issued on the spot ... along with the doctor's assurance that there is nothing to fear.

In other cases, patients could avoid making travel arrangements to and from the doctor's office and taking time off from work. It would also limit potential patient exposure to other illnesses, something that's certainly on all our minds these days. It's no surprise that, according to eVisit, a recent survey found that 74% of patients prefer online access to healthcare services over in-person visits. (evisit.com, 2018)

One worry eVisit points out is the risk of losing continuity of care in cases where virtual consultations link a patient with random providers. Yet as telemedicine evolves, concerns about provider shuffling might be reduced through the safe and secure sharing of patients' histories.

For most of us, telemedicine won't replace the ongoing relationship with our primary care provider, but it may save a trip to the office for minor complaints. In spite of potential areas for concern around patient privacy and online security, telemedicine can be a useful and convenient option.

By the way, if you are planning any weeding or brush clearing in the garden this summer, be sure to wear gloves and long sleeves. Oh, and check with your doctor's office to see if they are equipped to handle a virtual appointment. Just in case. ♦

Sources:

eVisit.com. (2018). "10 Pros and Cons of Telemedicine." Retrieved March 9, 2020, from [eVisit.com](https://www.evisit.com).

Research and Markets.com. (2020). *Global Telemedicine Market Outlook 2022*. Retrieved March 9, 2020, from www.researchandmarkets.com.