



## Telemedicine; what is it and how great is its potential?

Advancements in technology have changed how we do things in more ways than most of us could have ever previously imagined. This has been exacerbated in the current climate of a global pandemic. Telemedicine or Telehealth are technologies that have been around for a while, allowing ophthalmic clinicians to reach patients that were previously without access to their clinic or specialties, and reach a wider range of patients in need. We are now using telemedicine to combat both medical and commercial needs whilst the pandemic lockdown is in effect.

Telemedicine is defined as the remote delivery of healthcare services and clinical information using telecommunications technology.

Telehealth, on the other hand, is used to describe diagnosis, triage, management and education.

The use of either allows:

Doctors to treat patients, regardless of the patient's geographical location.

Gives patients more freedom to decide when and how to see their clinicians.

Helps patients take control and make better informed choices regarding their eye health.

Adoption of digital technologies, in particular telemedicine, was on a slow burn in the ophthalmics sector pre-covid. Now the industry is scrambling around for solutions that have been in the market for years, often dismissed or thought not to add significant value. This is in complete contradiction to where big pharmaceuticals, equipment manufacturers and the investment community predict the market is going. Over the last few years,

all the big players have either acquired or partnered with some type of digital telemedicine system. Why? The answer isn't simple, but the root cause is; persistent touch. By creating a mechanism to enable companies, practices and even investors to have direct and consistent contact with their end user, they are able to maintain or increase market share, measure product acceptability, deliver what the customer wants and, by proxy, increase value all the way down the chain.

We live in a world of convenience. Your patients expect it, we all do - but this is not conducive to a normal practice setting, so we see a lot of customers spending their money elsewhere (particularly online), when with a few simple changes, that money can be driven back into practices. The world has changed and it will never be the same! Practices need to change and how they work needs to be augmented with digital technology such as telemedicine and telehealth, creating that persistent touch with their patients. This will increase customer loyalty, reduce follow ups, raise paid chair time and capture product revenue that is currently going out of the door.

AOS believes that neither telemedicine or telehealth is a full solution, just components within a comprehensive, more robust approach. The ability to triage a patient live through video calling using objective analysis, secure transfer of images between the clinician and patient, creation of a patient report/ treatment plan and the ability to order and deliver that treatment plan directly to the patients' door via a single system, is the deliverable for AOS. This is not some whimsical fantasy, it is achievable. All the pieces are there and in the very near future will become commonplace, not just during Covid, but as an evolution of the industry as a whole.