

## Wyoming Telehealth Network

### April 2023 Provider Spotlight



Dr. Paul Johnson, MD, MPH

#### Wyoming Medicaid Medical Director

This month, the Wyoming Telehealth Consortium is welcoming Dr. Paul Johnson to his new role as the Medicaid Medical Director for the state of Wyoming. A longtime champion of telehealth and former Wyoming Medical Society president, Dr. Johnson has been appointed as the chairperson for the Wyoming Telehealth Consortium and will be leading our work into the future. He grew up in Laramie, Wyoming and graduated from Laramie High School in 1995. He enjoys all aspects of general ENT, and has particular interest in pediatric ENT, allergy, sinus surgery and thyroid surgery. His outside interests include travel, running, playing hockey, watching college sports and spending time with his wife and daughters. Learn more about his journey with telehealth in this month's provider spotlight.

**I. When did you first hear about telehealth? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?**

**Provider:** I first heard about telehealth as a medical student. I attended medical school through the WWAMI program. I was doing an internal medicine rotation in Jackson and my attendings were discussing a new way that patients in rural communities could receive primary and even specialty care. Since that time telehealth has really exploded in Wyoming. Telehealth is commonly used in emergency settings with tele-cardiology and tele-stroke services. The state

partners with Seattle Children's to provide child psychiatry support. Mental health services represent the lion's share of telehealth services provided in Wyoming.

## 2. When did you begin offering telehealth services? What prompted the need to offer these services?

**Provider:** I was interested in providing telehealth services, but never got around to offering them in my busy practice. Like many providers, I took the plunge out of necessity during the Covid pandemic. It quickly became part of my normal practice and continues even as we progress out of the pandemic.

## 3. What motivates you to continue offering telehealth services?

**Provider:** I continue to provide telehealth services because my patients benefit from it and some even demand it! As a specialty provider in our rural state, patients necessarily need to travel to visit with me. There can be significant boundaries for some – road conditions, unreliable transportation, economic concerns, taking a whole day off work, etc. I know this greatly improves access to my practice.

## 4. What is your proudest accomplishment with telehealth?

**Provider:** My proudest accomplishment really is that my partners and I were able to so quickly adopt the technology! I am not the most technologically savvy person. I had the assistance of our Gen Z office setting up my hardware and software and then I was off to the races! My staff and I were quickly able to provide education to our patients to empower them to give it a try.

## 5. What advice would you give patients wanting to try telehealth?

**Provider:** Give it a try! Telehealth can be administered on the telephone, through a smartphone application, a computer or at an established remote facility. Your provider should have resources on your options and provide you with instructions if a computer or smartphone application needs to be downloaded. I would make plans to be in a quiet, private environment with adequate lighting for your visit. Considerations might be made for what you are wearing to the visit if you have a particular physical finding to show your provider.

## 6. What advice would you give providers wanting to start offering telehealth?

**Provider:** Give it a try! As physicians and other healthcare providers, we are inherently adept and learning new things and have a passion for improving our patients' health.

## 7. What was the biggest barrier in providing telehealth services? Have you overcome it?

**Provider:** I think the biggest barrier in providing telehealth services was the novelty of it to me and most of my patients. I also think there is a learning curve with identifying appropriate patients and visit types for a telehealth visit. I am certainly more facile with this. I am actively working on learning new physical exam skills.

**8. How do you think implementing telehealth now will affect how things will be done at your organization after the pandemic is over?**

**Provider:** We plan to continue telehealth at our facility. We are seeing an initial decline in use as we come out of the pandemic. I anticipate we will then see continued uptake as providers and patients become more familiar with it and we see continued innovation to expand its application.

**9. Is there anything you learned the hard way in telehealth implementation?**

**Provider:** I think patient and visit selection was initially difficult. As a surgical specialist, some patients are referred to me with physical exam findings and without imaging to review. I would need to ask these patients to come into the office (and no charge their telehealth visit). In my practice, telehealth visits are particularly helpful for lab, diagnostic study reviews, consultations and selected postoperative visits.

**10. Do you have any telehealth hacks or tricks?**

**Provider:** Have a back-up plan! Telehealth is wonderful and the technology is constantly improving. However, we've all experienced technology glitches. Our organization has an application that works both on our desktop devices and smartphones. I've had to transition to my smartphone during a power outage and to the telephone when a patient is having an issue on their end. Just bring a good attitude to the visit and roll with the punches. This is what we do with in person visits too.

**Bonus Question: Do you have a favorite podcast, book, or author?**

**Provider:** TED Health is an interesting podcast from the organization that hosts the TED Talks we all know and love.