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## Consumers want virtual-care options

By Dave Barkholz

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About 78% of consumers say they would be interested in receiving virtual health services, but only 1 in 5 has had that opportunity, according to a new survey from Accenture conducted by Nielsen.

Physicians could save big money by providing more virtual services in combination with seeing patients in their offices, said Frances Dare, Accenture managing director of virtual health services.

About \$7 billion worth of primary-care physicians' time annually could be saved if patients could shift annual exams out of the doctor's office to home; do electronic visits for after-care and question-answering; and if they didn't have to go to the doctor for certain chronic disease management, such as for hypertension and diabetes, Dare said. Accenture made those estimates by analyzing federal health data, she said.

Providers who ignore that consumers desire the convenience and cost-savings of virtual healthcare are likely to see patients turn to competitors "willing to make it available," Dare said.

"Consumers are clear: In the 21st century, 20th century healthcare is not good enough," she said.

The Accenture survey included 1,501 consumers who answered questions online in October.

For the 1 in 5 respondents who had received care virtually, the reasons they cited most often for seeking virtual care are: greater convenience than traditional in-person healthcare services (cited by 37%); familiarity using technology to manage their health (34%); and curiosity to try virtual health (34%).

Consumers said they would be more likely to "try virtual" if encouraged by a physician (cited by 44% of respondents) or a healthcare payer (31%).

Dr. Bill Conway, CEO of the 1,100-physician Henry Ford Medical Group in Detroit, said patients of the Henry Ford Health System are making 3 million visits annually via the online My Chart system to check their health records or make appointments remotely using the secured personal portal built as part of the system's Epic health records platform.

That's a sign of consumer appetite for the convenience of telemedicine, he said.

"Virtual care is going to really explode," Conway said.

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