

# History of Telehealth

*by Capella Healthcare*



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the history of telehealth. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Mid-19th Century
2. Mid-20th Century
3. The 21st Century

## 1. Mid-19th Century

Telemedicine may seem like a recent phenomenon, but it originated in the mid-19th century when the invention of the telegraph, and later the telephone, made rapid communication across long distances possible. In 1924, *Radio News* magazine featured a cover illustration of a family interacting with their physician via a video screen, which was very innovative considering radios were not mainstream at the time and televisions were not yet invented.



*The practice of telemedicine promoted on the cover of the April 1924 issue of Radio News Magazine.*  
Source: DP Health Now. (2017). What is Telemedicine? [Blog]. Retrieved from [www.dphealthnow.com/what-is-telemedicine/](http://www.dphealthnow.com/what-is-telemedicine/)

## 2. Mid-20th Century

Telemedicine – as we now know it – likely began in the mid-20th century from military applications and space industry technology. It started with transmitting radiology images, electrocardiogram monitoring, education, and the supervision of advanced practice professionals and students. The phrase “telemedicine” was first coined in the 1950s to define delivery of health services from a distance, although it has taken nearly 70 years for it to become an accepted service offering.

There were several obstacles hindering progress, such as lack of reimbursement, shifting consumer attitudes, physician availability, steep technology costs, access restrictions, and security concerns. In fact, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) faced opposition from physicians and healthcare professional groups when attempts were made to insert telemedicine into its value-based reimbursement model.

## 3. The 21st Century

Interest in telemedicine was not widespread until the late 1980s and 1990s when internet access to information led to an increase in consumers' desire to access their care on their own time and preferred location. On-demand care and virtual visits enabled consumers convenient access to providers and specialists. Innovations in technology led to greater connectivity between healthcare entities and secure access to electronic health records (EHR).

According to the American Hospital Association, the number of hospitals fully or partially implementing computerized telehealth systems increased from 35% in 2010 to 76% in 2017. Additionally, more than half of hospitals have implemented remote patient monitoring capabilities as of 2017.

The advent of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 has catapulted telemedicine into the mainstream. Many of the barriers to implementation were overcome by relaxing the federal and state rules and regulations governing telemedicine, making it easier for providers and healthcare professionals to provide this method of healthcare delivery.

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## Support

If you are struggling with a concept or terminology in the course, you may contact **TelehealthSupport@capella.edu** for assistance.

If you are having technical issues, please contact **learningcoach@sophia.org**.