

## EDITORIALS

## Expanding Patient Access to Quality Sleep Health Care through Telemedicine

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In January the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) officially launched AASM SleepTM, a state-of-the-art telemedicine platform that was designed specifically for the sleep field by the AASM. This milestone represents the dawn of a new era for sleep medicine. Through AASM SleepTM, the potential now exists for any patient in any state or U.S. territory—including those in the most remote rural areas and underserved urban communities—to receive quality care from a board-certified sleep medicine physician and the sleep team at an AASM-accredited sleep facility. For patients all across the U.S., access to sleep medicine expertise is now a reality.

In addition to improving patient access to high quality sleep care, telemedicine provides unprecedented convenience that will enhance the patient experience of care. By connecting with a sleep specialist through live, web-based video visits instead of traveling to the sleep center, patients can save valuable time and money. For example, a recent analysis of all telemedicine visits at one Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital found that telemedicine resulted in an average travel savings of 145 miles and 142 minutes per visit.<sup>1</sup> The convenience of telemedicine appointments also enables patients to take less time off from work, which is one reason why telemedicine programs can result in high levels of patient satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> This convenience can be especially important for the long-term management of a chronic disease such as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). In fact, one study of a comprehensive, telemedicine-based OSA management pathway found that patient feedback “was overwhelmingly positive.”<sup>3</sup>

By improving patient access and convenience, telemedicine promotes positive health outcomes. The effectiveness of telemedicine depends on a variety of factors, including the severity of the condition and the function of the intervention.<sup>4</sup> It also relies on the expertise of the provider, which is why I’m so optimistic about the potential impact of telemedicine on the sleep field. Board-certified sleep medicine physicians and the team of health care professionals at accredited sleep facilities provide the highest quality of care for patients with sleep disorders, and this care has been shown to be associated with better treatment adherence.<sup>5</sup> Now, through AASM SleepTM, sleep specialists have a powerful tool that facilitates exceptional care more conveniently and for more patients with OSA, chronic insomnia and other sleep disorders.

The launch of this dynamic system was no small undertaking: AASM SleepTM is the culmination of years of planning and strategizing by the AASM board of directors and staff, who have been focused on positioning the field of sleep medicine to thrive in the midst of a rapidly changing health care environment. It also required a substantial financial investment, along with more than a year of production that comprised thousands of hours of computer coding and technical development. I’m unaware of any other medical society that has made a similar commitment to create its own, custom-designed telemedicine system. This forward-thinking initiative puts sleep medicine on the cutting-edge of health care delivery.

Because AASM SleepTM was custom-designed by the AASM, it includes special sleep-specific features that make it much more than just a secure video platform. These features include an interactive sleep diary and sleep log, sleep questionnaires, and the option for patients to import sleep data directly from wearable consumer sleep monitoring devices. As a comprehensive telemedicine system for the sleep field, AASM SleepTM gives sleep clinicians an unparalleled view of patients’ sleep habits.

Although the integration of telemedicine in a sleep practice requires a learning curve, I hope sleep specialists embrace AASM SleepTM as a tool for comprehensive, value-based, patient-centered care. Telemedicine is being adopted rapidly in a variety of health care settings.<sup>6</sup> The time for sleep clinicians to get in the game is now.

To equip sleep specialists to implement a telemedicine program, the AASM is developing multiple resources and educational opportunities. Already the AASM has published a position paper for the use of telemedicine, which addresses salient issues such as clinical considerations, quality assurance, roles and responsibilities, ethical and legal considerations, core standards, and billing and reimbursement.<sup>7</sup> Currently, an AASM task force is developing a follow-up paper with practical insights to help clinicians integrate telemedicine successfully.

At the end of the day, AASM SleepTM is about providing patients, regardless of their location, access to quality sleep care. Meeting this expectation requires widespread adoption of telemedicine by sleep practices across the U.S. I encourage all sleep specialists to visit [sleepm.com](http://sleepm.com) to sign up your sleep practice today. AASM SleepTM is granting sleep clinicians immediate access to the future of sleep medicine.

## CITATION

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## SUBMISSION & CORRESPONDENCE INFORMATION

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