



ABC Statement on Telehealth in Orthotics & Prosthetics

PATIENT CARE SERVICES provided by telehealth delivery models can aid communities traditionally underserved—those in remote or rural areas with few health services and staff—because it overcomes distance and time barriers between healthcare providers and patients. The use of telehealth technologies began mainly in rural communities and within federal health programs. Telehealth is now being used in various medical specialties and subspecialties across care settings. Given the broad proliferation of computer and smartphone technology in the everyday lives of the general population, telehealth has expanded rapidly in health care delivery to patients.

ABC recognizes the use of telehealth as a method by which some elements of O&P care may be delivered and how that may enhance patient-provider collaborations, improve health outcomes and increase access to care when appropriately used as a component of a patient's care.

Episodic, direct-to-patient telehealth O&P services may be used when necessary to meet the patient's ongoing needs. Telehealth services must be secure and compliant with federal and state security and privacy regulations.

While the use of telehealth may be appropriate in certain circumstances, the potential benefits of telehealth must be measured against the risks and challenges associated with its use, including the absence of the physical evaluation and variation in state licensing regulations.

A valid patient-healthcare provider relationship must be established for a professionally responsible telehealth service to take place. Facilities and O&P care providers must not compromise their ethical obligation to deliver in-person, clinically appropriate care for the sake of new technology adoption and/or for the sole purpose of saving costs.

Practicing according to standards and guidelines published in the ABC *Code of Professional Responsibility, Scope of Practice and Facility Accreditation Standards* ensures the safe and effective delivery of O&P services. The standards of care and practice required for any in-person encounter must also be followed for any encounter via telehealth.

Due to the hands-on nature of O&P care, providers must recognize that elements of the services they provide cannot be accomplished virtually.