Intermountain Healthcare

Healing for life®

Webside Manner

Creating great telehealth experiences for patients

Getting Started

***Bedside** manner is a healthcare professional's ability to create a positive rapport with the patient and deliver information clearly.*

***Webside** manner is the way in which a healthcare professional interacts with patients to create positive rapport and deliver clear information through telehealth.*

Why does your webside manner matter?

Obviously, technology is what makes telehealth possible—it's a tool that can extend **access** to care anytime, anywhere. But technology by itself doesn't ensure **quality** or **safety** or a great **experience**. Technology doesn't eliminate the need for patients to have a good relationship with you. You—the human element of a telehealth interaction—are still the key to extraordinary care.

"Our results show that the beneficial effects of a good patient-clinician relationship on health care outcomes are of similar magnitude to many well-established medical treatments...many of these medical treatments, while very important, need to balance their benefits against accompanying unwanted side effects. In contrast, there are no negative side effects to a good patient-clinician relationship."

The influence of the patient-clinician relationship on healthcare outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials, PLOS One, 2014

How do you develop great webside manner?

There are steps to consider prior to, during, and following a telehealth interaction that will help you communicate as effectively with your patient as if you were in the same room. But how do you overcome the inherent barriers of technology—the distance, the virtual presentation, the missing touch—to create good relationships? In short, practice.

This course will help you learn how to have meaningful interactions and deliver extraordinary care to your patients through telehealth. The concepts and behaviors you'll learn are not difficult, but they may be new to you and it require effort and practice to master them.

At the end of the course, use the guided practice and reflection exercises to get comfortable with telehealth before "going live." Get feedback from your colleagues and your patients to continuously improve your webside manner.

What skills are important for a great webside manner?

As a telehealth provider, you'll need to become comfortable and competent "being on stage," managing the interaction from a distance, and making the virtual environment feel safe to the patient. In the following sections, you'll learn key concepts that will help you develop a webside manner that creates a great experience for your patients.

- Telepresence
- Tele-etiquette
- Clear communication
- Conveying digital empathy

- Out-of-the ordinary communication situations

Manage Your Telepresence

Simply put, telepresence is the "view of you" on a video screen. When it comes to telehealth, looks do matter. Remember that patients, family, and colleagues are seeing you through high-quality video. They might be viewing a large television screen or monitor, a tablet, a laptop, or a smartphone. Here are a few tips to help you put your best self forward in every telehealth situation.

Adjust the equipment

- **Center yourself in the screen.** Adjust the camera to remove empty space above your head and don't cut off the top of your head. The patient should have a view of your head and shoulders.
- **Check the picture quality.** Use the camera software to control the brightness and adjust the color to give a realistic view.
- **Test the audio.** Your voice is part of your telepresence, too. Make sure you can hear and be heard. Using a headset with a microphone can help improve sound quality for both you and the patient.

Control your environment

- **Clean up the background.** In the same way that you prepare your office for an in-person appointment, take a moment to consider your surroundings seen through the camera. Choose a simple wall or decoration—nothing too busy or bright—for the background. Remove clutter, PHI, food and drink, or other things patients shouldn't see. Use a backdrop if necessary.

- **Check lighting.** Low light leads to poor image quality. Backlighting from a window or light source makes your image look like a black shape to the patient. Place lighting in front of you for the best effect.
- **Reduce background noise.** Select a quiet environment. A headset can reduce background noise for the patient and help you understand better.
- **Eliminate distractions.** Patients only get a few minutes of your time, and you want them to know that they have your full attention during the visit. Make sure that team members, ringing phones, or other distractions don't interrupt your encounter.
- **Protect patient privacy.** Your patient's privacy should remain a top priority regardless of whether your interaction takes place in person or online. Be extra-aware of what the patient can see through your camera as well as what others can see or hear about them.

Show your best self

When you're on camera, all your actions are magnified. While an in-person patient might pay attention bad posture or nervous habits, these things become more pronounced on a video screen.

"Sitting six feet away from your doctor, in person, you might not mind or notice her slouching, fidgeting, or gesticulating. But a webcam's intimate vantage point augments these actions in ways that patients can find distracting or off-putting. You take a sip of coffee and your mug takes up the whole screen, and all they hear is the sound of you slurping, or you turn away to make a note, and now all your patient sees is your shoulder. Maybe you disappear from the frame entirely."

Telemedicine is forcing doctors to learn "webside" manner, Wired Magazine, 2017

- **Limit hand gestures.** If you're gesturing off-screen or directly in front of the camera, it can be distracting to the patient. Limit hand gestures or, if necessary, zoom out so your gestures are part of your telepresence.
- **Avoid absent-minded movements.** Habits like twirling a pen or playing with your hair are distracting in the same way hand gestures can be.
- **Maintain a good posture.** Whether you're seated or standing during a video visit — don't slouch or lean to one side. Sitting/ standing up straight or leaning forward shows the patient that you are engaged in the visit and have their full attention. Poor posture can be interpreted as being unengaged and give the impression that you want to end the visit.
- **Be aware of your facial expressions and body language.** Facial expressions and body language are also amplified in a virtual interaction. You know how crossed arms or eye rolls are perceived in person. Those kinds of physical gestures make an especially negative impact on screen.
- **Dress professionally.** Wear your usual uniform, lab coat, or other professional clothing. Avoid bright colors, busy patterns, all dark, or all light clothing. Muted colors and pastels typically look best.

- **Use the picture-in-picture (PIP).** Regularly check yourself on your camera view to see what is being seen by your patient.

Never assume you're not on camera when you're in the presence of a camera.

Never assume a microphone is turned off when present.

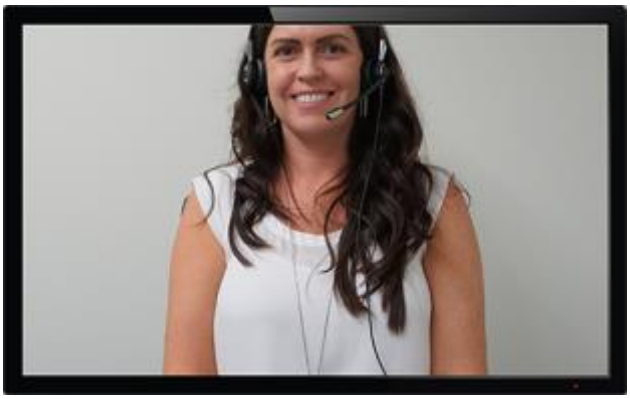
Always maintain your telepresence.

Telepresence examples

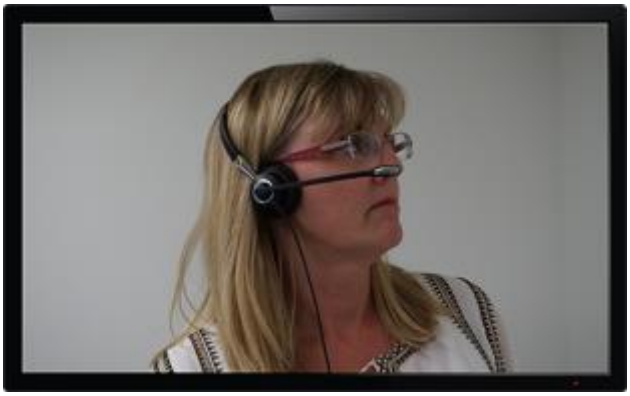
1 - Lighting behind you makes your image too dark.

2 - Never eat or drink when you're on camera.

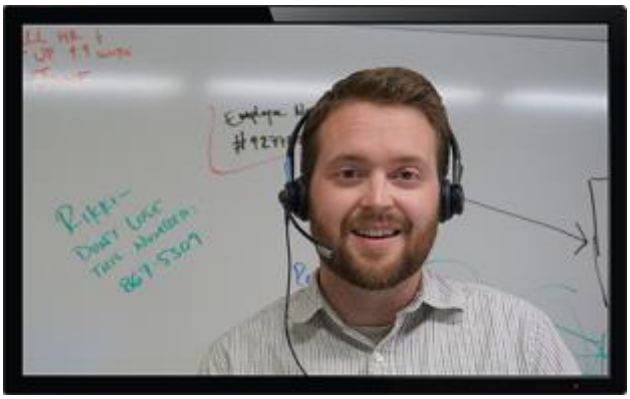
3 - Be aware of your posture and body language and the message it sends to the patient.



4 - Center your image on screen--make sure your patient can see your entire head and shoulders.



5 - If you need to look away from the camera, let the patient know what you're doing.



6 - Be aware of what your patient can see in the background. Keep it clean and free of PHI.

7 - The best telepresence allows the patient to focus on you and what you're saying.

Mind your Tele-etiquette

Tele-etiquette is a set of guidelines to follow to make your interactions more effective and comfortable for patients and build your relationship with them.

- **Acknowledge everyone in the room.** That might include care team members with you as well as family members or others with the patient. Consider who might be off camera.
- **Maintain eye contact with the patient.** You can't actually make eye contact because you aren't in the same room, but you can make it appear to the patient that you are looking right at them. *Looking into the camera is like looking into the patient's eyes.* This is not an easy or natural thing

to do. Adjust the camera position relative to the screen view of the patient to help guide your eyes to the right place.

- **Don't eat or drink when you're on camera.** Avoid doing anything during a video visit that you wouldn't do during an in-person visit.
- **Describe what you're doing aloud.** If you need to look away from the camera—to view a chart or make a note, for example—tell the patient what you're doing or looking at so they understand you're not ignoring them or feel like you're distracted. Similarly, instead of reflecting in silence, tell the patient what you're thinking about.

The following videos show an ICU telehealth call from a critical care nurse but the demonstrated principles of telepresence and tele-etiquette apply to any telehealth interaction.

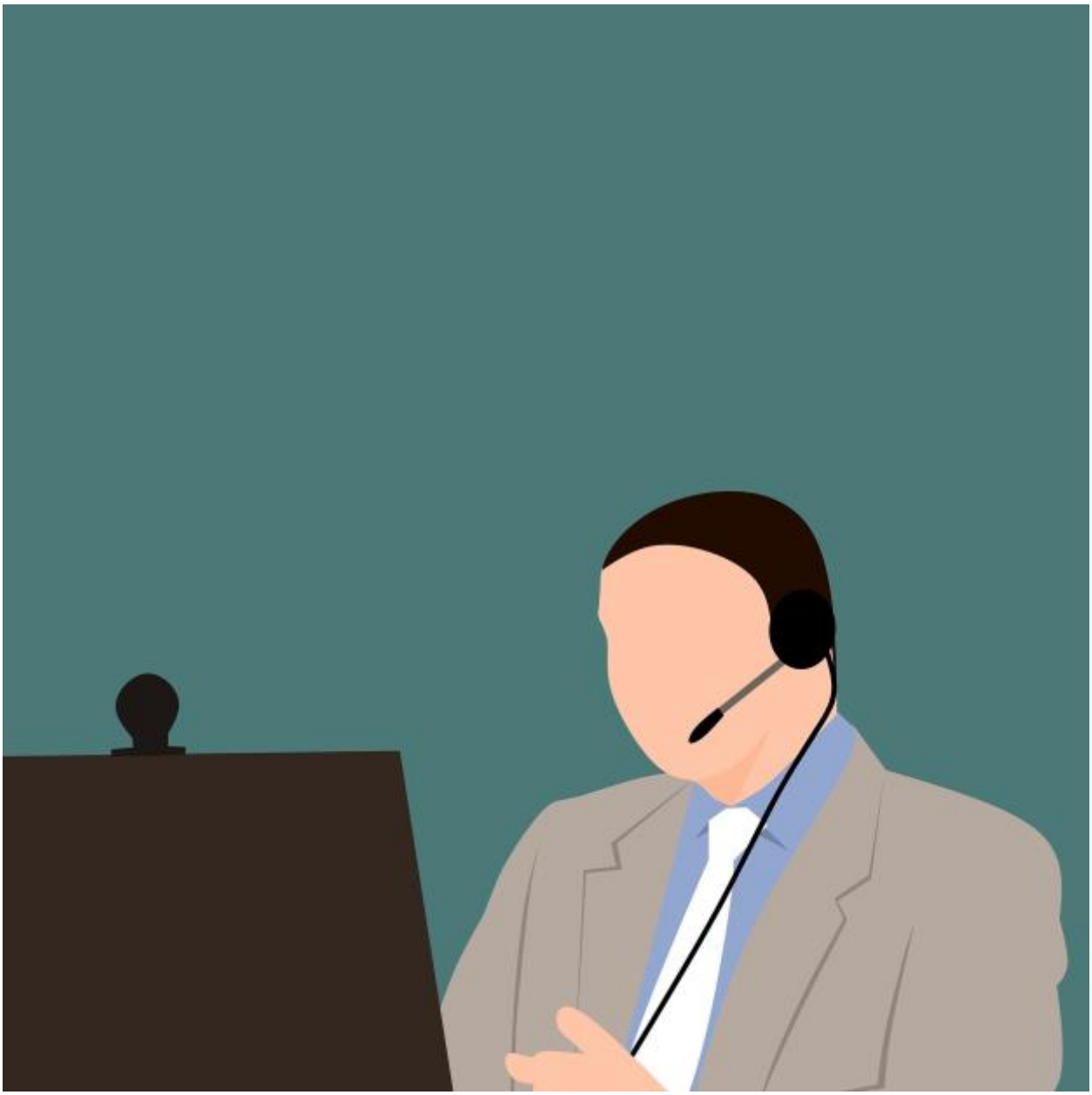
https://sway.office.com/m5AHvFPQt3GS7Vns#content=WxKqItzQgaq3ts

8 - What's going wrong here?

https://sway.office.com/m5AHvFPQt3GS7Vns#content=GVrtykA0Na2kEj

9 - What's going right here?

Clear Communication During a Telehealth Interaction



Whether it's your first telehealth interaction or your hundredth, don't let the technology throw you! Remember that with any interaction, online or in-person, clear communication with your patient is important to their success. Here are a few telehealth communication tips to keep in mind.

- **Ensure your hardware is in working order.** Take the time to ensure your webcam, microphone, speakers, headset, and any other hardware devices required for your virtual interaction are set up and ready to be used.
- **Be familiar with the TeleHealth process.** Having a basic understanding of the process that you follow, as well as the one your patient follows, is extremely useful if any questions arise.

- **Start the video interaction with clarity and purpose.** In the same way you would for an in person visit, take a moment to set the tone for the interaction. If you don't know the patient well, be sure to introduce yourself. Clearly explain what you expect to happen during the session. Ask the patient if he or she has questions or concerns about conducting the visit remotely, especially if telehealth is a new experience for them.
- **Create a personal connection.** Social small talk at the beginning of the telehealth encounter provides an opportunity to start an authentic conversation and connection between you and the patient.
- **Pay attention to your verbal style.** What is your tone of voice like—friendly? Confident? How are you posing questions to the patient? Are you allowing "wait time"— meaningful pauses to let a patient to respond?
- **Be an active listener.** By making it clear that you're listening, you provide a sense of purposeful "being with." That's important to the development of the patient-provider relationship. Verbally acknowledge you're hearing the patient or use gestures like a nod. Paraphrase to confirm what you heard from the patient.
- **Manage your time in the beginning.** For scheduled visits, set the expectation with your patient to allow a few extra minutes of "set up" time prior to your first virtual interaction. For urgent/ on-demand visits, learn what you can about the patient before connecting with them.
- **Manage your time at the end.** If you run out of time and end the video session abruptly, it will feel to the patient like you've hung up on him or her. Allow time to wrap up the visit by answering the patient's questions, restating the treatment plan, and outlining next steps.
- **Ask for feedback.** Perhaps one of the most important things telehealth providers can do is ask for feedback as they translate their bedside manner into a virtual domain. By developing a good webside manner, telehealth can become an even more powerful tool to build your practice and create, strengthen, and retain patient relationships.
- **Follow up with your patient as needed.** If there were questions, concerns, or problems during the virtual interaction, know who to contact or who to direct your patient to contact (for example, the technology support team) prior to the next interaction.

"Even for digital natives, social digital communication differs greatly from the type of information exchange required in a healthcare encounter. Eliciting information in a face-to-face encounter permits auditory and visual cues that are more nuanced or may be absent in a virtual encounter, unless they are specifically probed. Physicians must learn effective means of interviewing and examining patients using two-way auditory, video, and digital data. While basic communication concepts can be outlined in a brief document, digital communication is essentially a behavioral skill learned best through application, feedback, and practice."

A model for mHealth skills training for clinicians: meeting the future now, mHealth, 2017

Convey Empathy in a Digital Environment

It is well documented in medical literature that communicating with empathy not only positively impacts patient satisfaction, but also has strong positive effects on health outcomes (not to mention reduced malpractice litigation). We also have evidence that digital communication has disrupted the way we interact with each other and that the expression of empathy is reduced in digital settings.

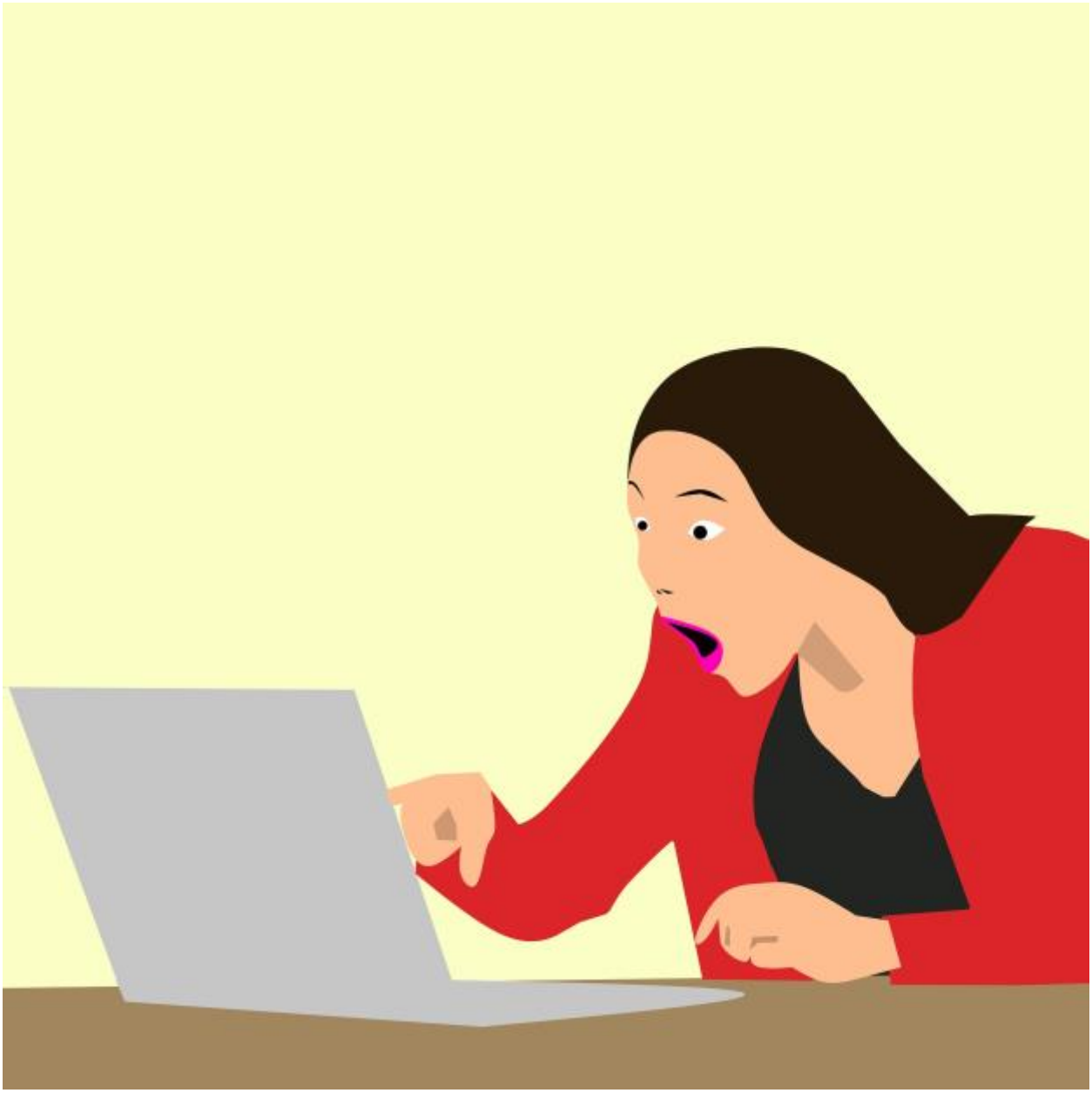
What does this mean to you right now as you're preparing to give extraordinary telehealth care? The good news is that what you already know about communicating with empathy applies to digital healthcare as it does to in-person interactions. And much of what you've learned here about telepresence and tele-etiquette also directly contributes to empathetic communication. Here's a review.

- **Put yourself in the patient's shoes.** Consider their perspective and challenge your own biases.
- **Verbally acknowledge what the patient is feeling or going through.** For example, "I bet that felt scary (or frustrating or unfair or awful…)"
- **Pay attention to the patient's non-verbal cues.** Does their body language match what they're saying? If not, ask probing questions.
- **Create a personal connection.** Social small talk at the beginning of the telemedicine encounter provides an opportunity to start an authentic conversation between you and the patient.
- **Maintain eye contact with the patient.** Looking into the camera is like looking into the patient's eyes.
- **Be an active listener.** By making it clear that you're listening, you provide a sense of purposeful "being with." That's important to the development of the patient-provider relationship.
- **Manage your time.** Allow time to wrap up the visit by answering the patient's questions, restating the treatment plan, and outlining next steps.
- **Ask for feedback.** Perhaps one of the most important things telehealth providers can do is ask for feedback as they translate their bedside manner into a virtual domain.

"Empathy isn't just something that happens to us—a meteor shower of synapses firing across the brain—it's also a choice we make: to pay attention, to extend ourselves. It's made of exertion."

The Empathy Exams, Leslie Jameson, 2014

Out of the Ordinary Communication



Interpretation needs

Intermountain provides free language interpretation for patients using telehealth just as it does for in-person care. Patients will indicate their interpretation and language need either using the Connect Care app or requesting assistance directly from a caregiver during the intake, scheduling, or care processes.

- For Connect Care *scheduled video visits*, the need for an interpreter is identified at the time an appointment is scheduled with the patient so an interpreter can be scheduled at the same time.
- For Connect Care *urgent care visits*, on-demand interpretation is available, though depending on the language need, there may be a delay in securing an interpreter.

- For telehealth care in hosptials or clinics, follow usual facility procedures to secure an interpreter. Interpreters can be in-person, on video (on an iPad or TeleHealth cart), or on the phone.

For more information, visit the Connect Care Interpretation Services page on intermountain .org or the Language Services site on intermountain.net.

Threatening or abusive behavior

While the likelihood of a patient acting in a threatening or abusive manor during a telehealth visit is low, it can, and has, happened. Refer Intermountain's Recognize and Respond Guidelines to guide your actions. A more comprehensive procedure to manage these kinds of telehealth encounters is in development and will be shared broadly when approved.

Guided Practice

Your next step is to practice. You'll need a partner for at least one of the exercises—choose a colleague, a family member, or a friend. When you're done, reflect on the experience and what you learned. *

**You may be required to complete a separate online reflection assignment prior to going live with video visits.*

Click here for a print version of the following practice exercises.

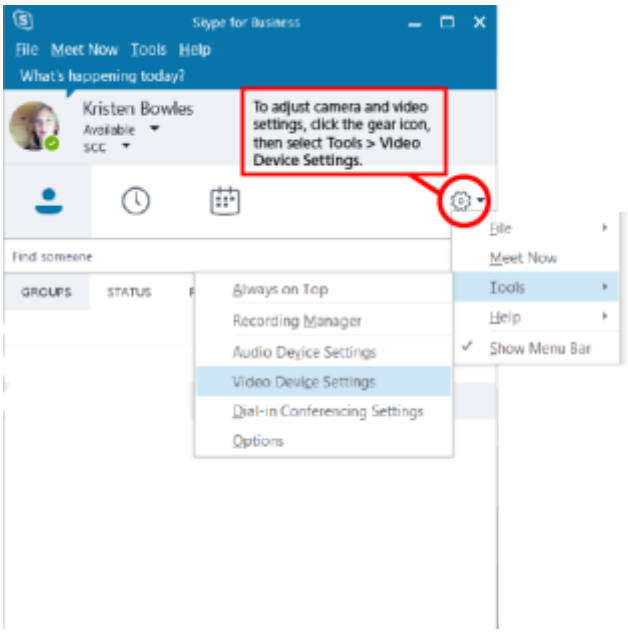
Observe and adjust your telepresence

NOTE: A *Webside Manner - Practice and Reflection* course is available in My Learning for assingnment and tracking.

Use Course 213957.

You can do this activity alone or with a partner on a Skype call with you.

Use Skype for Business or similar platform to get a better understanding of your telepresence —practice by adjusting the web camera and the video and audio settings. Observe your telepresence and environment and think about how it would contribute to, or detract from, the patient's experience.



10 - Go to Tools > Video Device Settings to adjust the camera and picture quality in Skype. Other platforms may have similar tools that allow you to manage your telepresence.

- **Center yourself in the screen.** Adjust the camera position and/ or the zoom to capture your head and upper torso.
- **Check the picture quality.** Adjust the brightness and/ or hue, if needed
- **Test the audio.** (Go to the Audio Settings in Skype. This works best with a partner.) How well can you hear with and without headphones? Can your partner hear you clearly without static or background noise?
- **Clean up the background.** What's behind you? Should you remove anything from view or change your position?
- **Check lighting.** Where's your light source, behind you or in front of you? Is there enough light?
- **Reduce background noise.** Is there anything you can do to eliminate the sound of voices, copy machines, phones, etc. around you?

- **Eliminate distractions.** Where's your phone? Is it turned off or muted? How will you keep from being interrupted?
- **Protect patient privacy.** Is there anything on screen that your patient shouldn't see? Would passers-by be able to see or hear anything about the patient on camera that they shouldn't?

Describe what you learned about your personal telepresence. What, if anything, about being on camera was easy for you? What was challenging? What will help you consistently show the "best view of you" to your video visit patients?

Role play a telehealth visit

You'll need a partner on a Skype call with you for this activity.

Simulate/ role play a digital patient encounter with a partner. Apply what you've learned about telepresence, tele-etiquette, communication, and empathy to make the patient feel as if you are there in the room with them. **Role play starting the visit with the patient, asking and answering questions, referring to her chart while conversing, and ending the visit.**

Scheduled visit scenario

This is a follow up visit with a patient recently diagnosed with Type II diabetes. She's grateful that she didn't have to leave work for this appointment with you, but is a little apprehensive since this is her first video visit. You have her chart up in a separate monitor.

Urgent care scenario

The patient called Connect Care because he has a rash on his arm. He's never used Connect Care before but chose to today because his son has a game a couple of hours and he doesn't want to miss it. You've reviewed the intake information and can see his chart in iCentra.

Acute care scenario

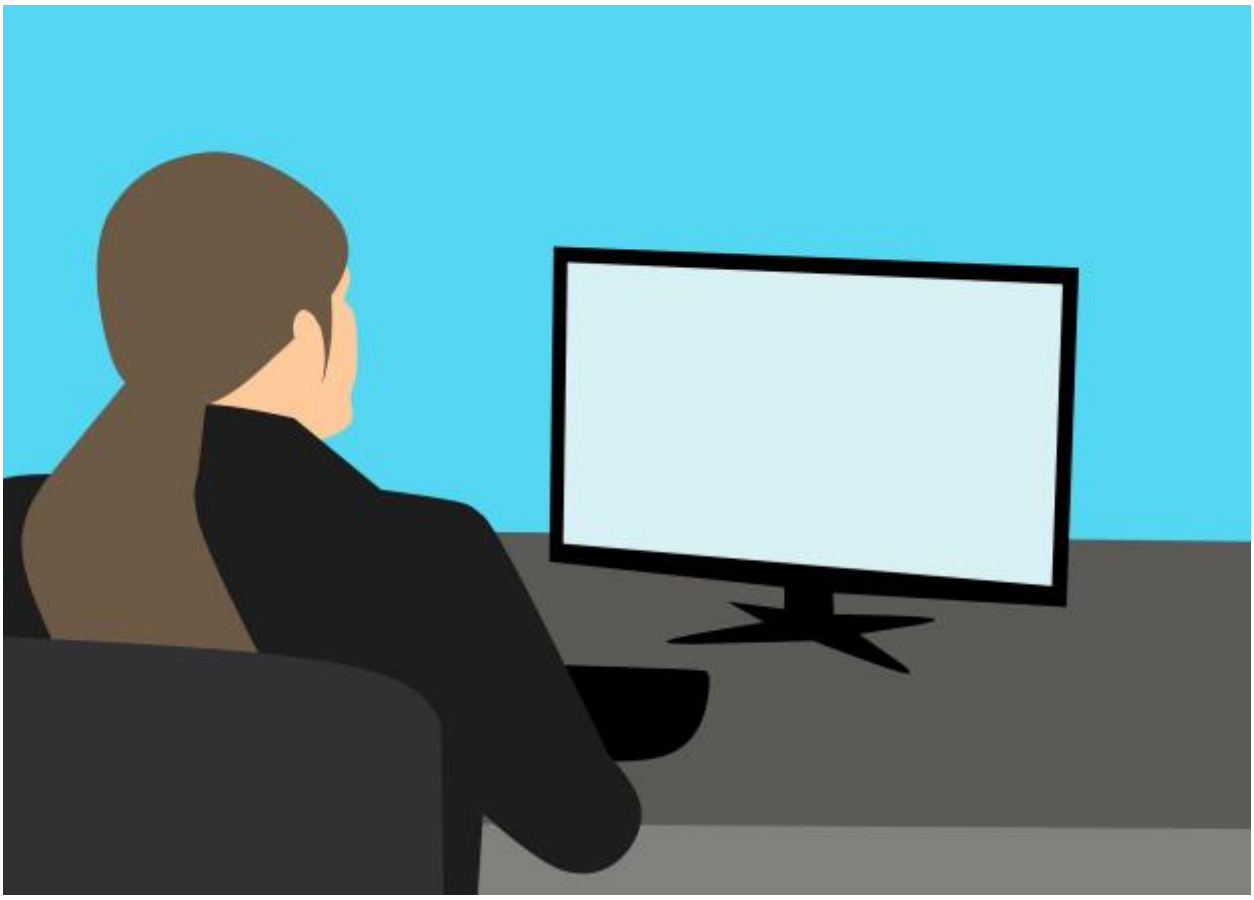
You're connecting to a patient who's in the ICU after suffering a heart attack. The patient's wife and daughter are visiting him. None of them have experienced telehealth before. You are viewing the patient's chart in iCentra and concerned about results from a recent chest x-ray.

Now reflect and review with your Skype partner:

- Did you acknowledge everyone in the room? Did you ask if anyone was off camera?
- Did you maintain eye contact with the patient?
- Were you eating or drinking or chewing gum or doing anything else that you wouldn't normally do in an in-person patient interaction?
- Did you describe what you were doing aloud, such as looking at a chart or reflecting on a question or problem?
- Did you actively listen and allow the patient to respond to questions?
- Did you show empathy?

When you role played a video visit with a partner, what was surprising or notable about the experience? How comfortable did you feel communicating via telehealth compared to your comfort level with in-person communication. Is there a specific aspect of digital communication you want to work on to help create great patient telehealth experiences?

Wrap Up



Thanks for continuously learning and improving your telehealth skills. Remember, the best way to continue to develop your skills is to practice. Keep working at being a great communicator and healthcare provider in the digital space. Get feedback from your colleagues and patients. Share what you learn with others.