



# Surveying the Industry: Healthcare Professionals Make the Case for Telehealth

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## Executive Summary

Telehealth represents one of the most promising technology solutions in the healthcare space – from the need to reduce readmissions, engage patient populations and address long-term chronic care, to the ability to make healthcare more accessible. Remote patient monitoring, in particular, has been demonstrated the most efficient method for managing chronically ill patient populations while consistently maintaining best outcomes. Nevertheless, a vast majority of healthcare providers have not been able to incorporate telehealth technologies – despite the desire to do so.

To better understand the pain points and roadblocks healthcare providers face, MobileHelp Healthcare recently conducted a comprehensive market survey of healthcare professionals. The results demonstrate that while the benefits of telehealth are very clear to those in the provider space, investing in a new program or expanding an existing one presents significant challenges – from fiscal difficulties to personnel shortages.

Examine the results of the MobileHelp survey to understand not only the value and potential healthcare providers see in telehealth solutions, but also the challenges they face for implementation and how those challenges can be addressed by products on the market today.

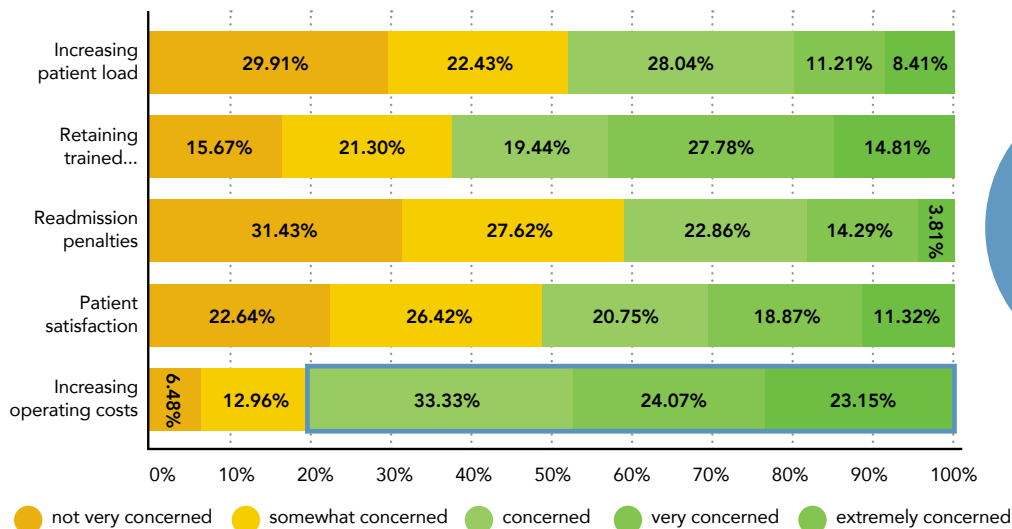
## The Survey: Results Support Telehealth

To gain broad stroke understanding, MobileHelp initially asked about primary concerns among its healthcare provider participants, among five suggested topics:

1. Increasing patient load
2. Retaining trained nursing staff
3. Readmission penalties
4. Patient satisfaction rates
5. Increasing operating costs

As the graph in Figure 1 indicates, the largest area of concern (with more than 80 percent of the participants) fell around “increasing operating costs,” with the next largest areas of emphasis being “retaining trained nursing staff” and “patient satisfaction rates.”

### What are you concerned about?



Over **80%** are concerned about **increasing operating costs**

Figure 1. Ranking of challenges facing your organization.

## Do you utilize remote patient monitoring (RPM)?

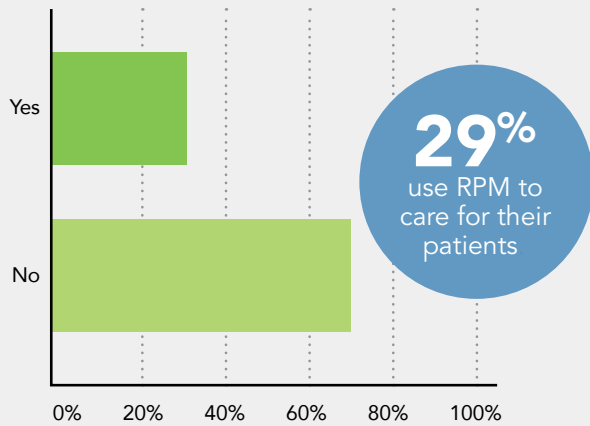


Figure 2. Organizations utilizing RPM

## What patient conditions would benefit from the use of telehealth?

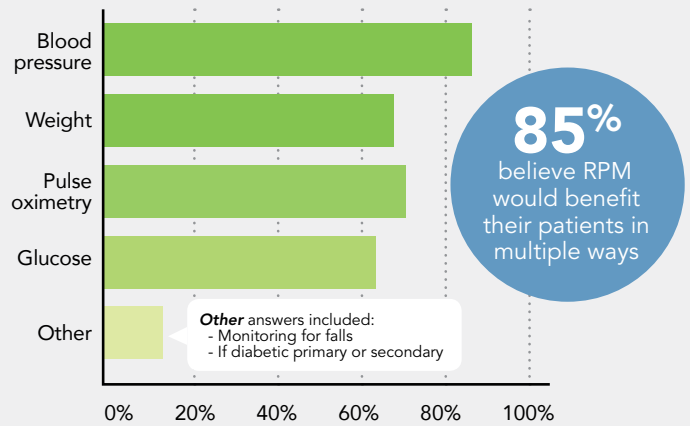


Figure 3. Types of monitoring patients may benefit from

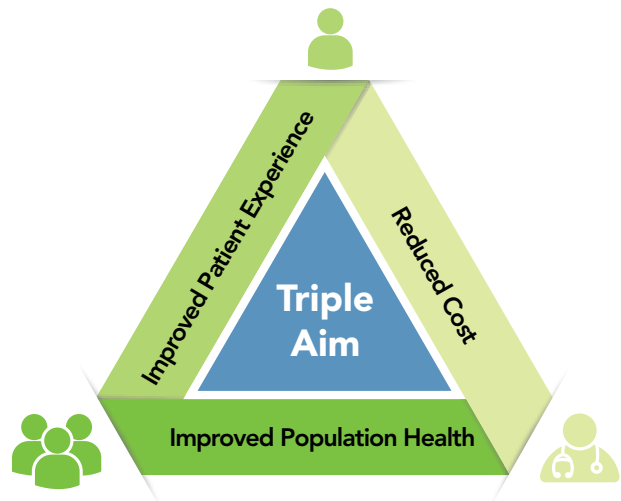
When asked follow-up questions related to technology and its ability to help address the major areas of concern, healthcare providers offered the following feedback (depicted in Figures 2 and 3, respectively):

- While only 29 percent of respondents reported using remote patient monitoring (RPM) to ease the burden of the issues expressed in major areas of concern,
- More than 85 percent of respondents felt RPM could benefit their patients in multiple ways.

These results are consistent with other research in the field, such as a recently released study from the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS): its survey revealed that 72 percent of respondents report that consumer and patient considerations – such as patient engagement, satisfaction and quality of care – will have a major impact on their organization’s strategic efforts over the next two years.

In addition, the HIMSS survey found that the value of information technology (IT) continues to be important to healthcare leaders, as

**81 percent of respondents** indicated **IT is considered a highly strategic tool at their organizations**. Participants in the HIMSS survey also answered questions related to how IT was being used to facilitate the goals of the Triple Aim: While more than two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) indicated an improvement within the patient health experience, more than half also felt that IT was reducing the cost of healthcare (53 percent) and improving population health (51 percent).



**Triple Aim for Populations** – Applying integrated approaches to simultaneously improve care, improve population health, and reduce costs per capita.

“This year’s survey showed that more than one-third of participants report that their organization was able to demonstrate improvement in all three areas covered in the Triple Aim as a result of their IT use,” said **John H. Daniels, Vice President, Strategic Relations for HIMSS.**

**The results of both the MobileHelp and HIMSS provider surveys are underscored by other studies, which indicate technology – and telehealth specifically – has the potential to:**

- 1. Reduce healthcare costs**
- 2. Provide much needed support to staff**
- 3. Increase patient satisfaction for an ever-growing patient population.**

## Technology Addresses Provider Concerns

In looking at the primary areas of concern for providers as indicated by the MobileHelp study, it is clear technology can be used to (at least partially) address them. With a principle concern related to reducing operating costs, a recent study by Towers Watson found that [telehealth could save as much as \\$6 billion annually](#) in U.S. healthcare costs.

This reduction in healthcare costs is based on three main aspects representing the cost savings, which also tap into other areas of concern for healthcare providers, as highlighted by the MobileHelp survey:

- 1. Reducing readmission penalties:** Telehealth is being used to help address high readmission rates by improving the follow-up care and care management of a range of patients—from the chronically ill to post-surgical patients. A report by the Commonwealth Fund found that [Partners HealthCare’s Connected Cardiac Care Program has seen a 50 percent](#)

[reduction in heart failure-related readmission rates](#) for enrolled patients since its remote monitoring and telemedicine pilot launched in 2006, with an estimated total cost savings of more than \$10 million.

- 2. Retaining trained nursing staff:** With the multiple locations many health systems currently operate, it follows that finding sufficient personnel is a challenge – and that staff members could experience high rates of professional burnout, resulting in leaving their positions. A recent article, [“What’s Missing From the Triple Aim of Health Care?”](#) cited the following: “Data related to nursing and other health care professionals also show high levels of burnout and depression; similar to physicians, the reasons often cited include increasing administrative (nonclinical) tasks, heavy patient loads, smaller staffs, and higher stress levels.” Telehealth enables health systems to better support and allocate staff throughout their healthcare facilities, providing staff members with the resources and support they need.
- 3. Increasing patient satisfaction:** One of the primary concerns expressed in the MobileHelp survey data was increasing patient engagement and satisfaction rates, an attribute highly correlated to use of telehealth services. In a [separate study](#) conducted by MobileHelp, users reported 47 percent increase in patient confidence levels regarding their ability to manage their own condition when they were able to monitor their own vital signs in the long-term.

With technology recognized for its ability to address provider concerns surrounding healthcare reform, the final piece of the equation involves implementation – and how current technology vendors are working with healthcare providers to support it.

## Challenges to Address

Despite the anticipated growth of the market as a whole, telehealth still presents challenges to healthcare providers as they implement it. For those who have not implemented a RPM program, the cost related reasons cited by 32 percent revealed delays for the following reasons: **1) high initial cost of equipment;** **2) length of time to realize a financial return on their investment;** and **3) No clinical oversight plan in place.**

When taking the above concerns into consideration, respondents find it difficult to add a program that may require additional headcount to manage.

## A More Efficient, Easier to Implement Alternative

Most providers intuitively see the benefits of combining personal emergency response systems (PERS) and RPM (see figure 5.) By combining RPM capability with a personal emergency response system (PERS) all in one unit, providers can now see their way to implementing RPM at a reasonable startup cost. A patient who is managing a chronic condition in a post-subacute environment is more likely to require access to emergency services; and studies have shown that outcomes are higher and costs are lower when emergency access is provided as expediently as possible. But in most cases, a provider will need to bring in a separate vendor to provide the medical alarm technology.

### Would your patients benefit from PERS + RPM?

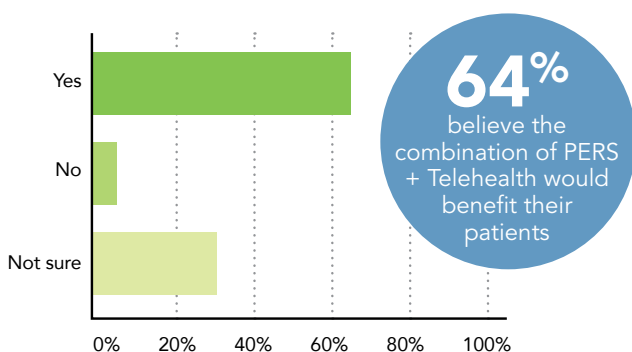


Figure 5. Perceived benefit from PERS + RPM combination

MobileHelp, a leader in mobile Personal Emergency Response System (mPERS) and healthcare technology solutions, is now offering remote patient monitoring and a medical alarm (PERS) in a touchscreen tablet – which features the company’s MobileVitals® telehealth solution – as well as unique ways for providers to engage with their patients, and for patients to engage more fully in their own health and well-being.

The MobileVitals platform provides patients with the benefits of traditional RPM for the reimbursable home health period, using a combination of the company’s MobileVitals telehealth solution with a clinical dashboard. Providers can utilize the solution to alert exceptions and then perform video visits with their patients in a timely manner. They can also provide customized education related to the patient’s specific disease state.

Following the reimbursable period, **patients can keep the telehealth equipment on a private pay basis** and shift to monitoring their own vital signs – allowing healthcare providers to essentially step out of the clinical care process – while allowing patients to **keep the tools they have grown accustomed to using** and to stay engaged more fully in their own long-term care.

Traditional RPM systems are not well suited for private-pay step down, primarily because patients (consumers) do not self pay for health monitoring. However, the combination of RPM with a medical alert (PERS), offers a proven business model that consumers are willing to pay for. In addition, it enables them to continue managing their chronic illness, increasing patient satisfaction rates.

## A Scalable Solution to Clinical Oversight

For many organizations, having no clinical oversight in place presents a difficult adoption hurdle to overcome. Most providers want to start small and pilot RPM on a small patient population. This makes it difficult to justify a new FTE and

# OUTSOURCING PATIENT TRIAGE

**Problem:** Providers are forced to allocate a telehealth nurse FTE (\$80-\$100K/year) or attempt to manage exceptions by existing case managers.

- Difficult to launch new program
- Not core competency

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**Solution:** Outsource phone triage.

- Allows provider to focus on core competencies
- Scalable – incremental per patient cost
- Usually more economical than dedicated headcount

an incremental \$100K to the annual budget to manage the exceptions. Consequently, many providers attempt to manage exceptions with existing case managers. This decision is a fatal step and usually results in slow response times (because case managers are busy making home visits), resistance by clinical staff that is not properly trained, and an often too-hasty conclusion that “RPM doesn’t work for our organization.”

A smart alternative is to outsource the exception management and patient triage to a company that specializes in this work. Because the oversight is scalable, it can be tested on an incremental basis and allows the provider to focus on its core business.

## First Steps to Success

The ability to leverage technology and outsource patient triage empowers providers to take the first step toward implementing RPM. As the survey indicates, there are a number of barriers to adoption, despite the clearly recognized benefits of telehealth utilization.

The new solutions that exist today within the technology sector can help address the barriers to RPM adoption, such as high start-up costs and logistics of clinical oversight. These solutions make it possible for healthcare providers to more confidently adopt telehealth and begin reaping the benefits of lower operating cost and increased efficiencies almost immediately.



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[www.MobileHelp.com/healthcare](http://www.MobileHelp.com/healthcare)

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