Teamwork in doctors’ offices, hospitals, and rehabilitation facilities is essential for improving patient outcomes. Yet there are hurdles that can hinder communication and collaboration among patient care teams. Members of these teams often span different disciplines, each with its own terminology, and they’re frequently located in different institutions and geographies. Continue reading to see how advanced collaborative tools are helping to overcome these hurdles and increase healthcare teams’ ability to provide the best patient care.

Every day, health providers must contend with a variety of factors that can cause communication breakdowns, including multiple clinicians interacting with each patient, care teams working in silos, and geographic distance separating patients and specialists. That’s why effective collaboration is crucial in the delivery of patient care. Without it, misinterpretation and missed critical information can potentially impact results adversely.

Consider too that patients who are increasingly used to interacting with other businesses digitally or via apps want a more consumer-friendly experience with their healthcare providers, whether that’s avoiding waiting room delays, getting test results back, or receiving care remotely via telemedicine. On the clinician side, healthcare CEOs say physician burnout is a public health crisis. Too often, new technology contributes to job stress and detracts from care delivery. Patients and healthcare providers alike need tools that are easier to use, take less time, and cause fewer hassles.
Advanced collaboration tools can help ensure personalized care experiences for patients, streamline clinical and business workflows, and improve knowledge sharing for faster innovation. Clinicians can communicate and work collaboratively with patients and with colleagues across their facility, down the street, and around the world. Interdisciplinary teams can communicate verbally and visually, breaking down silos that typically result from specialized terminology and processes.

Today’s advanced video and collaboration technologies are helping to deliver remote care and telemedicine seamlessly and securely. During a recent incident of mass violence in Virginia, for example, the University of Virginia (UVA) Telehealth team saved lives by using video collaboration to communicate between emergency responders with injured patients at the front line and physicians in the command center at the hospital.

These technologies are also instrumental in maximizing the use of limited resources. The Correctional Health Services division of NYC Health + Hospitals uses voice and video collaboration to facilitate specialist care visits and improve healthcare access for the 55,000 people moving through the city’s correctional system each year. Specialists at Bellevue Hospital began using voice and video collaboration to consult and treat patients whenever a live visit or surgery wasn’t required. As a result, Correctional Health Services has avoided dozens of trips to the hospital.

Remote collaboration
Many healthcare teams include remote team members who could benefit from enhanced communication and collaboration. Collaborative tools can now bring teams together through web video conferences, mobile access to meetings, document sharing, and electronic whiteboarding. All of which makes it easier to consult with busy specialists near and far, expand knowledge transfer between clinicians, and even integrate patient alarms and alerts.

For example, the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida, connects doctors and affiliates globally via a cloud-based meeting service. Doctors and researchers can set up their own “meeting rooms” and join using any device. Moffitt’s researchers and clinicians meet virtually with experts around the globe to discuss the latest cancer research and advances in patient care. They can effectively collaborate via diverse video systems and share documents, cutting travel time for offsite meetings by both doctors and IT staff.

Telemedicine trends
Patient care is often at the mercy of rising costs, lengthy appointment wait times, and difficulties in scheduling visits with doctors and specialists. Video communications technology makes it easier to increase access to quality healthcare and close the gaps in patient engagement and care management.

There is wide support for telemedicine among patient populations. Among consumers who have a primary care physician, 65% say they are interested in seeing their PCP over video, and one in five say they are willing to switch to a PCP that offers telemedicine visits. Similar survey data and first-hand accounts indicate growing support among physicians.

Almost two-thirds of consumers believe it is important for a telemedicine provider to have access to their health records. While EHR requirements are a frequent cause of grumbling among providers, a national survey indicates that vast majorities believe they produce clinical benefits and allow them to deliver better patient care. These records are a key factor in furthering collaboration, but disparate systems in use at different institutions often limit the sharing of these crucial care documents.

EHR-integrated video can extend the reach of care teams and speed up decision-making. Integration of collaboration tools with existing EHR systems can support video-enabled follow-ups, specialist consultations, and non-emergency visits. Virtual appointments that take place within a patient EHR can optimize workflows and provide continuity of care.

Focusing on patient outcomes
As the examples above demonstrate, collaboration and communications tools have increasingly vital roles to play in enhancing the patient and clinician experience. The use of video and web conferencing is a cost-effective means to leverage specialists across facilities both for care delivery as well as for knowledge sharing and training that foster interprofessional collaboration. It’s also instrumental in passing along skills and learnings to prepare the next-generation workforce. All of these elements can have a profound impact on patient outcomes.