



## RPA Telehealth Survey Results

June 2, 2020

### Background

In May 2020, RPA conducted a survey of nephrologists on their use of telehealth to provide kidney care to their patients in the wake of the COVID public health emergency (PHE), and the attendant policy revisions issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) under the guidance of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The survey was sent by email to approximately 3,400 RPA members three times between May 13 and May 22, and it was closed on May 25. It was also disseminated to non-RPA members through social media (primarily Twitter) multiple times in that period. By the conclusion of the survey period, 250 nephrologists had responded (an approximate 7% response rate).

### Results

A summary of the survey results is provided below. A top-line review indicates that (1) a majority of respondents are continuing to see their dialysis patients on a face-to-face basis (with proper use of personal protective equipment and social distancing) at least monthly; (2) the preponderance of chronic kidney disease (CKD) care provided to non-ESRD patients is now being provided via telehealth; and (3) there is overall satisfaction with the quality of the patient-physician encounters that occur via telehealth. Detailed survey results can be viewed [Here](#).

- The vast majority of respondents (74%) did not use telehealth prior to the PHE.
- The historic pattern of most U.S. dialysis patients receiving in-center rather than home dialysis care is reflected in the survey.
- Use of telehealth in kidney care has grown exponentially during the PHE.
- The number of patient-physician interactions has generally held steady during the PHE.
- Regardless of the originating site, in a vast majority of patient-physician interactions, the quality of those interactions were deemed to be either average, above average, or excellent.
- The support for telehealth provided by the dialysis facility was either average, above average, or excellent, according to 80% of respondents.

- Most nephrologists were aware that audio-only interactions for monthly dialysis were not allowable, and even among those who were unaware of this, very few provided MCP care by audio-only telephone visits.
- The vast majority of patients being seen by nephrologists were not COVID positive (or in a COVID test pending status).
- During the PHE, there has been a significant migration of CKD care to telehealth-based interactions.

### **Next Steps**

It is expected that one of the next key frontiers in U.S. health policy making will be how much of the changes made by HHS/CMS on telehealth in response to the COVID pandemic may be made permanent. In general, organized medicine has viewed the changes quite favorably and would support institutionalization of many of the telehealth policy revisions. However, many policy makers seem concerned that the widespread drawback of oversight responsibilities pertaining to telehealth will result in increased levels of fraud and abuse and must be approached deliberately and prudently.

Given that, RPA will use the results of the survey to inform our efforts to determine which specific policy revisions should be supported as decisions are made regarding how telehealth policy specific to kidney care and nephrology services will move forward. Additionally, RPA with the guidance from its Government Affairs and Health Care Payment Committees will evaluate the feasibility of publishing an analysis of the survey results.