

4 Key Steps to Successfully Start Telemedicine



By the **VSee**Team

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If you're thinking about telemedicine, it may seem overwhelming. How do I get started? What technology do I need? Is it legal in my state? Is it covered by insurance companies? How will I get paid?

In this article, we'll focus on how you can painlessly get your staff and patients on board with the technology. The good news is that everyone and their grandmother are loving their digital gadgets from iPads to FitBits. So now is the perfect time to get your telemedicine service out there. Now more than ever, wellness technology is inexpensive and can be used by anyone.

Get started now with these four easy steps to bringing telemedicine to your customers.



STEP 1:

Start Using Video With Colleagues



The first step is to get your physicians and staff comfortable with the technology. Start using video regularly throughout your organization. Try hosting your next meeting over video. Video call your family and friends. Get comfortable starting and ending calls, adjusting audio and video, inviting others onto the platform. Learn what you can and can't do with your video app. If you're not confident using your video technology, you won't be able to use it effectively with your clients.

We're sure you'll enjoy how much more communicative video meetings are. So next time someone invites you to a meeting, ask to meet over video instead.

Not sure what video platform to use? Here is a list of video providers you can try out:

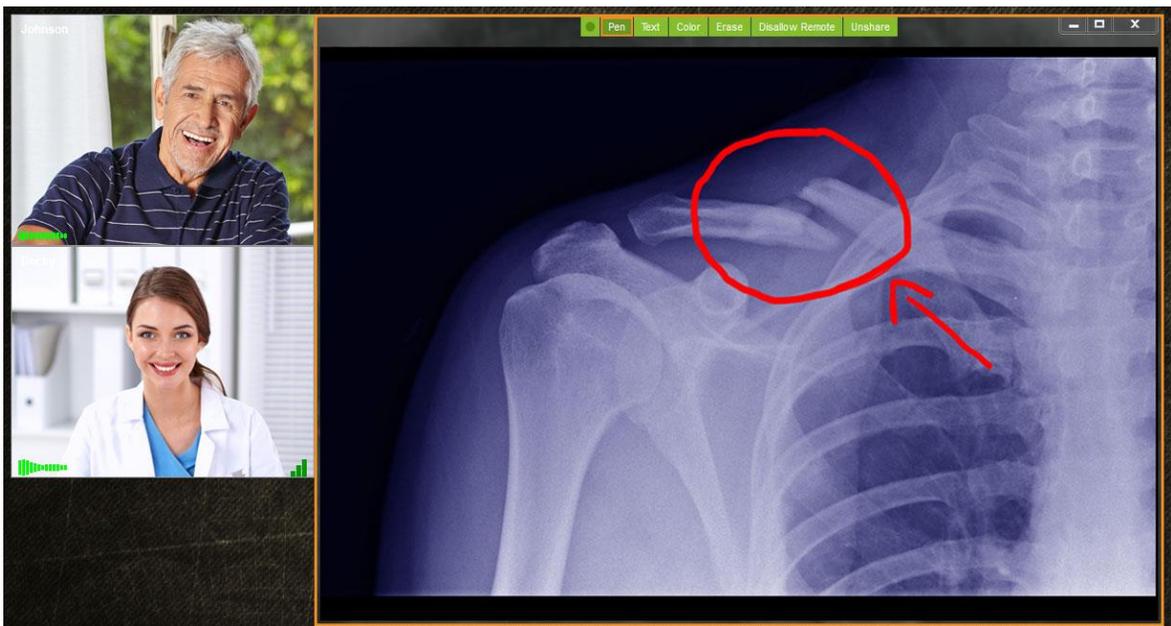
<https://vsee.com/videoconference>

Of course, we think you should start with our free VSee app. It's specially designed for telehealth calls (for groups, less than 7 participants is recommended although we've had as many as 25).

It allows you to

- easily share and mark up lab tests, MRIs, other medical documents without exposing your entire desktop
- securely send documents over video.
- stream digital device images live while still seeing patients faces (requires subscription)

Sign up for the free app at vsee.com



Some companies rush into telemedicine when their computers don't even have cameras! So take your time.

- Make sure your team has the equipment they need, including webcams, microphones, and speakers. If you're not sure what kinds of equipment to buy, [here](#) are some of our recommendations.
- Appoint a telemedicine tech guide(s) who is comfortable using new technology and can explain it to others. Maybe that person is you.
- Be aware of video limitations. Video chat is dependent on your Internet connection and how powerful your device is. With corporate firewalls, antivirus programs, crowded wifi connections, old computers and mobile devices abounding, you may need to get your IT involved if you find yourself having connection issues.

Be Aware of the Telemedicine Laws

It's best to start with your existing customers. In certain states you are required to "establish a patient-provider relationship" in-person before you can start seeing them via telemedicine. Also double check that you use an informed consent form if you're in one of the 26 states that require it. Each state's rules are different so be sure to check with the states in which you will be practicing.



STEP 2:

Get on Video with Patients—and Observe



Once your team is comfortable using video throughout your organization, then it's time to test it out with a few patients and clients.

You'll find that most patients are eager to start using video. Survey research and years of experience have shown that downloading an application is no barrier to adoption. Even if you serve an older population, you may be surprised at how willing they are to do video.



64% of consumers are willing to see a doctor over video according to a 2015 telehealth survey conducted by American Well"

First, train your team to do some basic troubleshooting. They should be prepared to make the video onboarding smooth for patients. Usually clients just need some simple guidance - checking the spam mail for their invite, adjusting the audio settings, or setting up a webcam. You may want to make your onboarding session separate from the actual consultation. At the very least, make sure you build in plenty of buffer time for the unexpected.

Second, observe and collect feedback on how your patients and providers use video and what sorts of issues they run into:

- What kinds of devices (laptop, mobile) do they prefer using?
- What kind of networks are they using (3G, corporate, home)
- What questions do your patients ask?
- What features do they like? What features do they have a hard time finding?
- What do they like or not like about the video experience?

The key is to have patience and be willing to hold their hand as they get acclimated to video consultation.

Once you capture these data, you'll get valuable insights into the technology's limitations and possibilities, as well as your patients' needs. You can later use this information to come up with a more customized telemedicine solution.



STEP 3:

Add A Waiting Room, Set Up Your Workflow

Armed with feedback from your patient's video experience, it's time to start streamlining your online workflow. You may find that the stand-alone video chat application meets your needs. However, we've found that most practices want to be able to manage video visits similar to the way they manage physical doctor visits – which means going to Step 3: trying out a virtual waiting room

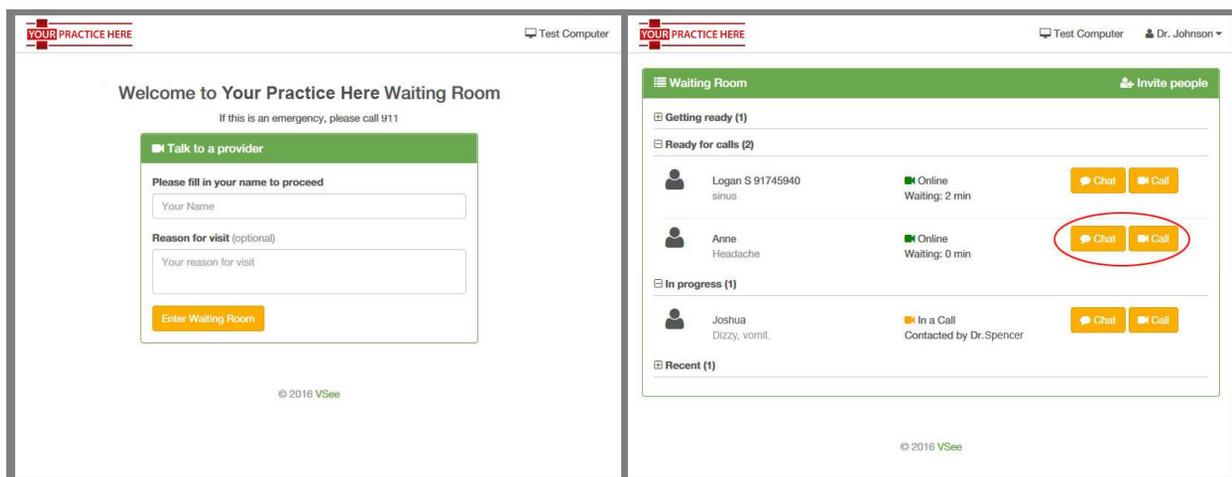


Figure 3.1 Example virtual waiting room with Patient Sign-in (left) and Provider Dashboard showing patient queue (right)

For us, a virtual waiting room is a simple web page or link that you can send your patients. On that page, patients simply sign in and wait for the doctor. Doctors and/or staff are alerted when a patient enters. They also have access to the online patient queue and can start a chat or video call when ready. See the figure 3.1 above.

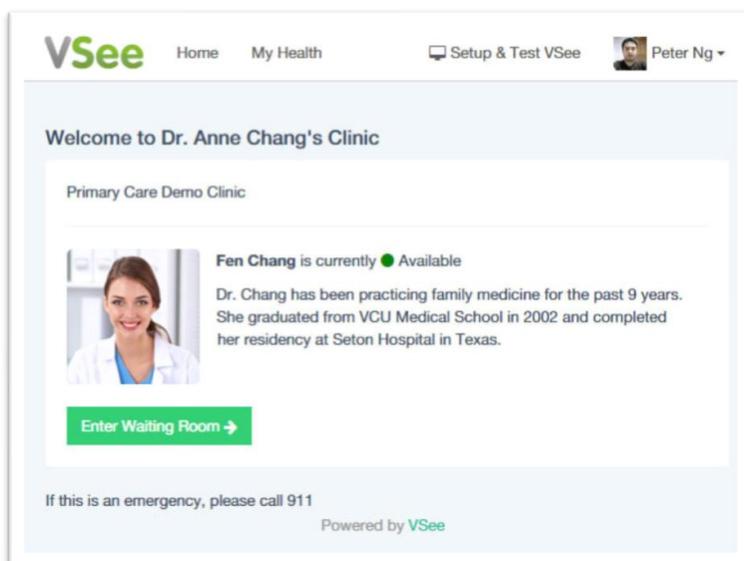
This may not be the case for other platforms, but we've found that this simple stand-alone vr model is a good stepping stone for new practices to get their feet wet. getting to your ideal telemedicine system. It's also a perfect for practices that already have a practice management system and just want to add a simple video component.

Typically, we see practices using one or both of these workflows:

1. Walk-In visits through your website—usually the patient doesn't care which doctor she sees, but is only looking for the first available provider.
2. By appointment—the patient has scheduled a consultation in advance, usually with a specific doctor.

What's great about the VSee Waiting Room is that it's so flexible. It works with either workflow, so you can discover what you really need without going down a wrong path for too long. For example, it let's you:

- add multiple providers to a waiting room
- link out to it as a stand-alone webpage
- embed it as a sign-in widget
- embed it as an “Enter Waiting Room” button directly in your patient portal (see Figure 3.2)



That being said, there are a zillion other [platform](#) choices out there these days for your waiting room – some are only for single providers, some are only for scheduled visits, some are only available as part of an EMR, some have device streaming.... If you're doing gymnastics to make the technology fit your workflow, either need to switch platforms or customize your platform. And truthfully, VSee may not be a best fit for you.

Once you have your waiting room, you'll want to test it out your waiting room much like the way you tested the stand alone video chat out.

- a) Get to know how it works by using it regularly for meetings.
- b) Make sure you get input from your physicians if you're not the physician.
- c) Try it out with a couple of patients and get feedback

Also think about how deeply you want to integrate the waiting room into your website. Depending on the platform you choose and the level of integration, you may need to get a special web developer. Also keep in mind that the deeper the integration, and the more complicated the workflow, the more time it will take to implement.

What About HIPAA Compliance?

HIPAA requires you to have a Business Associate Agreement with your technology provider. This ensures that everyone who works with Personal Health Information (PHI) is responsible for it.

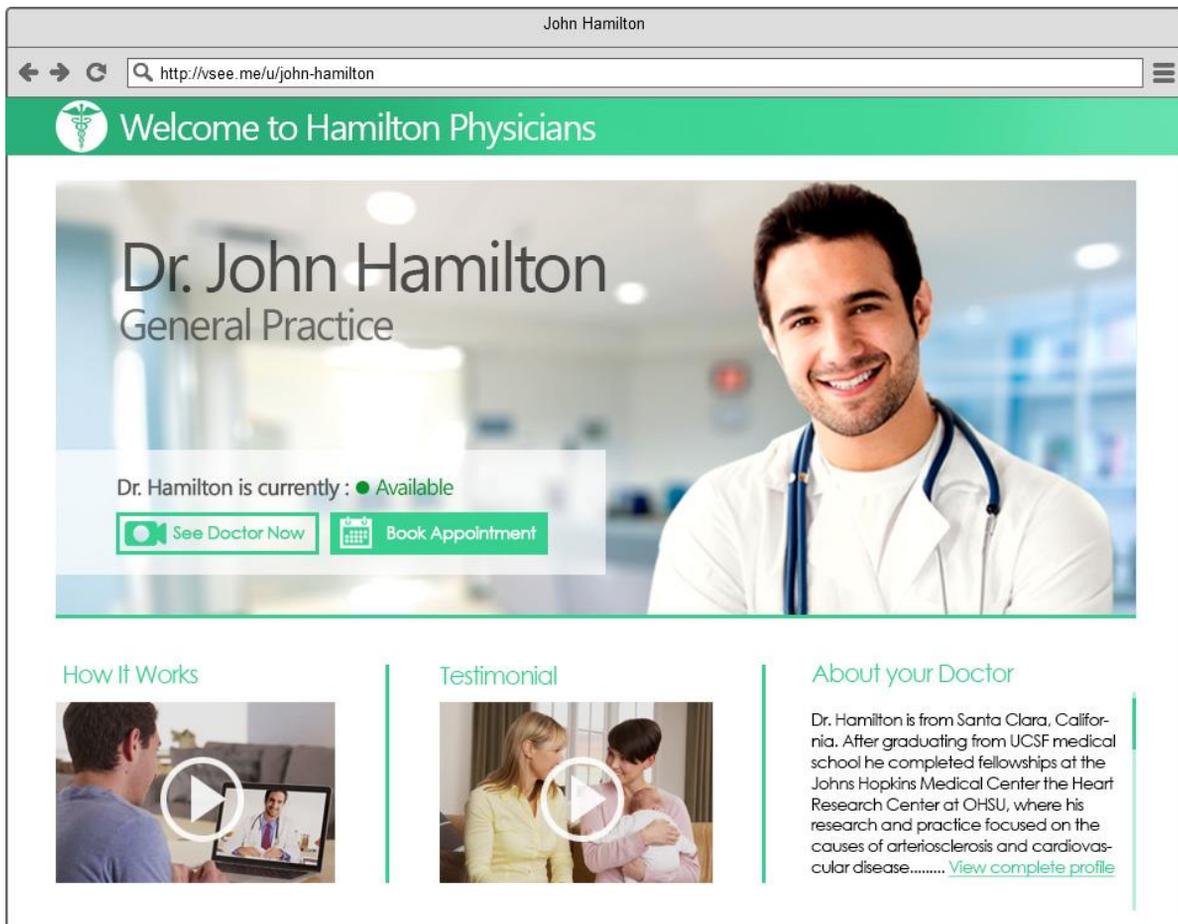
HIPAA does not require encryption for compliance if it is unreasonable (e.g. too expensive) to implement. However it is in your best interest to choose a video provider that encrypts your data. Learn more about

Videoconferencing and HIPAA-compliance at <https://vsee.com/hipaa>



STEP 4:

Discover Your Ideal Telemedicine System



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "http://vsee.me/u/john-hamilton". The page title is "John Hamilton". The main header is a green bar with a white medical icon and the text "Welcome to Hamilton Physicians". Below this is a large banner for "Dr. John Hamilton, General Practice" featuring a photo of a smiling doctor. A status indicator shows "Dr. Hamilton is currently: ● Available". Two buttons are present: "See Doctor Now" with a video camera icon and "Book Appointment" with a calendar icon. Below the banner are three sections: "How It Works" with a video thumbnail, "Testimonial" with a photo of a family, and "About your Doctor" with a text block and a "View complete profile" link.

By now, you should be a pro at video consultations, but you may find that you're having to manage too many different programs or you may have custom features you want to add to your platform.

Working with group practices and health systems, we've found that the ideal telemedicine system should tie together:

1. a full EMR with scheduling, notes, billing, ePrescription, and flexible search
2. healthcare or wellness device integration – where patients can automatically upload data from devices such as blood pressure cuff, FitBit, glucose meter, etc. and an easy way for doctors to track the data
3. a virtual waiting room for triage, workflow, and follow-up visits

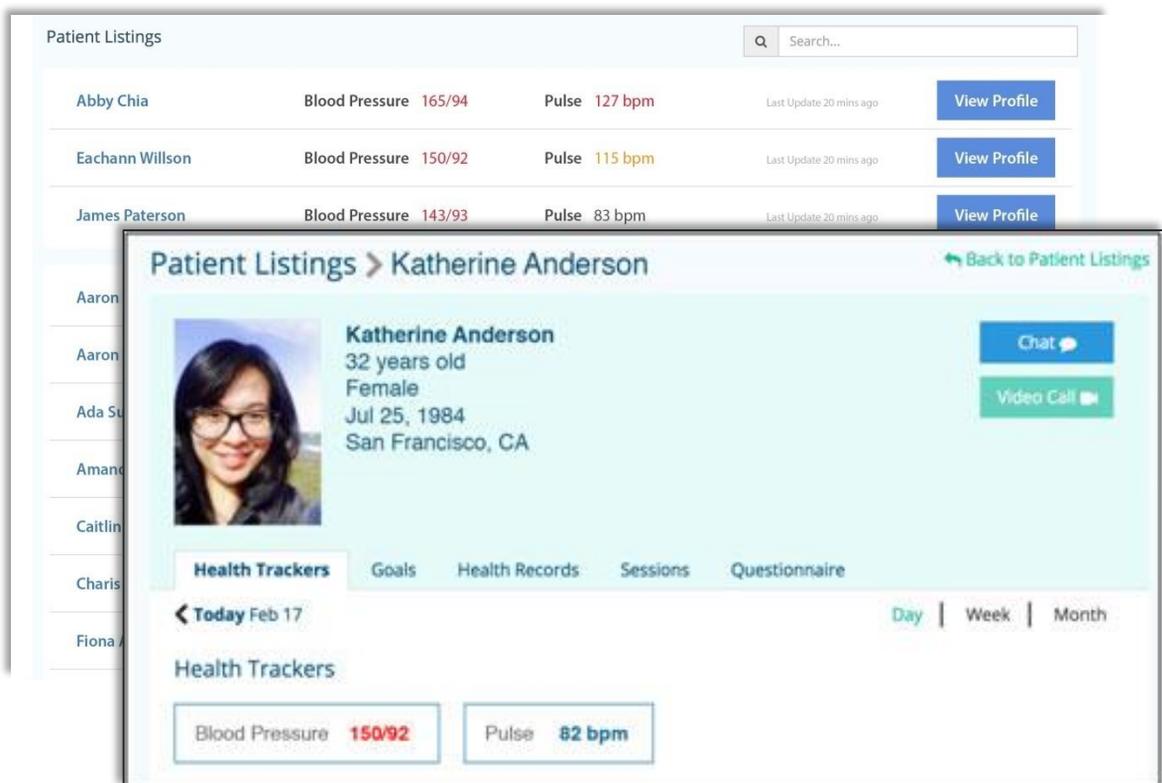


Figure 4.1 Custom telehealth chronic care dashboard with health device integration

Depending on the platform you choose and the level of integration, you may need to get a special web developer. The deeper the integration, and the more complicated the workflow, the more time it will take to implement.

Clearly, this won't be a one-size-fits-all kind of solution. You'll need to identify the specific problem(s) you want to solve using telemedicine. You'll also want to take into consideration the processes you already have in place and your observation notes from when you first started using video. If you don't build in-house, you'll have to find a telemedicine solutions provider that will work with you to provide design ideas and an implementation plan. The great thing is, you'll have already laid the groundwork for getting your stakeholders to use the system.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and a robust telemedicine platform will have to be updated and refined along the way. So make sure you choose a provider that communicates well with you and fits your organization's work style. Also don't expect to roll out a perfect platform. Start simple. Things will break and the features you thought you wanted will come and go. It's a mutual process of discovery with worthwhile results.



Figure 2. Fitness and health tracker data visualizations for a custom telehealth portal



Final Thoughts

Don't let the technology hold you back.
Start doing telemedicine today!

If you'd like more help, ask to speak with one of our telemedicine experts:

vsee.com/contactsales