

RESEARCH REPORT

Patients give high marks to their

Teledentistry Experience

Authors

Eric Tranby, PhD

Data and Impact Manager, Analytics and Evaluation
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

Rebekah Fiehn, MSPA

Manager, Care and Interoperability
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

Matt Jacob

Science Writer and Communication Consultant
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

Julie Frantsve-Hawley, PhD, CAE

Director, Analytics and Evaluation
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

Methodology

Advantage Dental from DentaQuest conducted a survey of 465 patients (ages 18 and older) who had a synchronous teledental visit from an Advantage provider in April and May of 2020. A total of 111 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 24%. The survey was designed to assess patients' perceptions of their teledentistry experience, and all survey participants gave their verbal consent. The survey questions were asked by a member of Advantage Dental's plan operations team during a telephone connection, and the answers given by each patient were recorded in an online database. Between four and five attempts were made to reach each patient.



Until recently, little was known about how patients would rate their teledentistry experience, in part because dental providers have moved more slowly than their medical peers to embrace telehealth. COVID-19 has put telehealth in the spotlight, demonstrating a more urgent reason to adopt these technologies for patient care continuity. Now, recent survey data indicates most patients want teledental-enabled care and may even prefer it.

Although the regulatory landscape in most states remains an obstacle to widespread adoption of teledentistry, how providers perceive their patients' feelings about technology-enabled care is also a significant factor in the willingness of providers to explore telehealth. Last year, [a Harris survey](#) of over 2,000 U.S. consumers revealed that two-thirds were open to using telehealth and that 1 in 4 would be willing to switch from their current primary care provider to one who offered video-connected services. And tracking with the COVID-19 pandemic timeline in the U.S., a report from the [Commonwealth Fund](#) shows telehealth visits rose 14% in a recent week.

Recently released survey data reveals that a clear majority of patients receiving a video-enabled oral health screening were pleased with their experience. The survey was developed by the DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement and conducted by [Advantage Dental from DentaQuest](#), a group of Oregon dental practices that instituted synchronous teledentistry (via telephone) in April 2020 to assess patients for urgent and emergent conditions and, if needed, refer them to emergency dental care amid the pandemic.



86%
of patients said
they would use
teledentistry again



93%
were able “to easily
understand what the
dentist told me about
my concern”



86%
would recommend
teledentistry to
another person



“It was really easy and quick.”

— Advantage Dental patient on their teledentistry experience

Here are the key findings from the Advantage Dental survey of 111 patients who received oral health assessments via teledentistry this spring:

- Nearly 9 in 10 patients (86%) said they were satisfied with their overall teledentistry experience.
- 86% said they would use teledentistry again.
- 95% said they were “able to speak freely with the dentist and ask questions” when they used teledentistry.
- 93% reported being able “to easily understand what the dentist told me about my concern.”
- 86% said they would recommend teledentistry to another person.
- 69% reported that their concern was taken care of during the teledental visit.
- Nearly one-third (31%) reported they didn't need in-office care following their teledentistry appointment.

Various factors can make it difficult for consumers to complete an in-person dental visit. More than half (52%) of patients agreed that a teledentistry appointment “makes getting care easier than a face-to-face appointment.” The survey question defined “easier” as meaning a patient didn't have to wait as long for their results or didn't have to travel as far. In the open-ended comments, patients reported the appointment was “really easy and quick” and that they “were really grateful that the dentist was able to take care of my problem and...get me out of pain.”

Patients are also more likely to cancel or delay a dental visit when it requires traveling far from home. For this reason, it's noteworthy that 52% of patients said they would have gone to another city to see a dentist if they hadn't used teledentistry. In addition, 42% of patients said they would have needed to take time off from work to get in-person care, and 28% said they would have needed to find child care to go to an in-office appointment.

This survey demonstrates that consumers are receptive to telehealth services. Most importantly, this dental-specific survey offers oral health providers reassurance that their patients are likely to be satisfied with a teledentistry experience and appreciate the flexibility it offers to secure oral health services without leaving their homes. This information is encouraging as [providers are increasingly using teledentistry](#) to connect patients to care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health is a national nonprofit championing a more equitable future where every person can reach their full potential through excellent health. We do this through our work in grantmaking, research, health improvement programs, policy and advocacy and education as well as our leadership in dental benefits, care delivery and innovation advancements. We collaborate with thought leaders, health care providers, patients and local, state and federal stakeholders, to accelerate oral health care transformation and create a system designed for everyone. To learn more, visit carequest.org.

This report and others are available at carequest.org.