

SELECT A CITY ▾

SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS TIMES

EAST BAY BUSINESS NEWS
Follow all our East Bay business news in one place >

YOUR ACCOUNT
davisliu1@gmail.com ▾

≡ INDUSTRIES & TOPICS 🏠 NEWS LISTS & AWARDS PEOPLE & COMPANIES EVENTS MORE... 🔍

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF DAVISLIU1@GMAIL.COM

From the San Francisco Business Times:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/2017/10/05/telemedicine-lemonaid-plushcare-john-muir.html>

Telemedicine 2.0: Doctors strive to phone it in

Oct 5, 2017, 10:37am PDT

Subscriber-Only Article Preview | For full site access: [Subscribe Now](#)

Telemedicine is evolving beyond connecting doctors and patients through video.

As technology and telemedicine business models evolve, some startups are focusing less on the video aspect of remote health care and more on what the remote aspect allows for. Services are now capable of providing a doctor's diagnosis within a few hours, complete with prescription and lab orders. Paired with pharmacy deliveries, it's possible to see a doctor and get medications without ever visiting a hospital or pharmacy.



TODD JOHNSON | SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS TIMES
Davis Liu, chief clinical officer at Lemonaid Health

San Francisco's PlushCare opened doors three years ago to help people get virtual access to doctors on urgent care issues. CEO [Ryan McQuaid](#) and Dr. James Wantuck, who founded PlushCare together, decided to only contract with physicians coming from the top 50 U.S. medical schools to ensure better quality. It now employs 50 doctors who can work flexible hours from anywhere, providing care in 18 states. Four hundred doctors are on the waiting list to work there, the company said.

Wantuck, who came from Stanford's internal medicine practice, thought health care was way behind other industries. Doctors still use pagers and patients cannot contact doctors or book appointments easily, he said.

The large telehealth companies focus on enterprise customers, helping companies add those services as health benefits. But McQuaid said they wanted to go direct to consumer and create something people actually used.

"(Companies) were basically paying for an unused gym membership," McQuaid said.

In 2015, Americans used 1 million virtual doctor visits, according to the [American Telemedicine Association](#). By 2016, that grew to 1.2 million visits.

Employers also see cost-saving incentives of offering telemedicine services as a health benefit. A National Business Group on Health survey of 140 large employers found 74 percent of employers offer telemedicine benefits last year, up from 48 percent in 2015.

PlushCare plans to expand its telemedicine services nationwide by next year. Video or phone appointments start at a flat rate of \$99 for first-time patients \$69 for returning patients. It partnered with [Quest Diagnostics](#) and LabCorp so patients can manage referrals and get results electronically.

Doctors see about four patients on video per hour and use email, phone or chat for other follow-ups. PlushCare does not disclose the number of patients it serves, but said it gets hundreds of encounters per day.

In 2013, Lemonaid Health began with a similar mission of getting people connected with doctors faster and cheaper. For \$15, insured and uninsured patients can fill out a survey or take photos and get a diagnosis within two hours. Thanks to a clinical algorithm they developed, doctors can treat common conditions like the flu and urinary tract infections in about one minute.

With three full-time doctors and a support team of three, Lemonaid handles thousands of appointments per month throughout 17 states. Dr. Davis Liu, chief clinical officer, worked 15 years at Kaiser Permanente in primary care before Lemonaid. Liu believes patients can get more continuous care through this service compared to video visits.

"You can't put a doctor on video for 15 minutes. That doesn't make it more efficient. We've distilled the essence of what we need in that visit, and that allows the doctor and patient to have efficiency and lower costs by having technology help enable that through history taking," Liu said.

Lemonaid is expanding beyond urgent care to add cholesterol, hypertension and diabetes services next month. In two years, it completed 48,000 visits through its online and mobile applications.

"If the evolution of medicine in the next five to 10 years is still doctors on video only, then we have failed," Liu said.

Some larger health systems are developing their own telemedicine programs. [John Muir Health](#) launched its own service, called eVisit, in 2015. Dr. [Deborah Greer](#), director of urgent care at John Muir Health, said the ease of use resonates with patients.

"It's a convenience thing. Once they realize that, they'll come back," Greer said.

Any patient can access eVisit for \$25 and get a doctor's response within the hour. It uses a clinical algorithm system through a partnership with virtual health company Zipnosis to provide fast diagnoses on typical cases. eVisit doctors can spend about two minutes per case on average. Since 2005, John Muir has completed 4,000 eVisit appointments.

John Muir plans to expand its eVisit program to include "zip tickets," a way of expediting patients that need quick in-person care to the front of the line. Someone with strep throat, for example, could get the online portion done and then get a ticket to come in to urgent care for a swab and get a diagnosis.

"This is really the wave of the future," Greer added. "People are getting more comfortable having their lives on their phone, receiving their health care online. We are able to get more and more people to do things at their convenience."

Antoinette Siu



Reporter
San Francisco Business Times

