For many organizations, telemedicine offers the ability to improve access to medical services while potentially lowering the costs associated with the delivery of care. This objective aligns well with the national mandate to deliver efficient and effective care in a consistent and reproducible way. With this framework as the goal, the implementation of a telemedicine program requires the active participation of physicians, clinical and management staff, as well as patients. Each of these stakeholders plays a significant role and contributes to the successful implementation. Here are five essential factors to consider when implementing a telemedicine system:

1. **Create and maintain a steering committee composed of a multi-disciplinary team of physicians and clinical and management staff.** The purpose of this steering committee is to develop the mission and vision of a telemedicine program within the organization. All committee members should embody the position of the organization that telemedicine is simply a tool that supports quality and cost effective care. Initially, this steering committee should develop and update a project plan with deadlines and budget variances and eventually create the policies and procedures related to the use of the telemedicine program. The committee should also serve as the communication hub for internal purposes. All concerns related to equipment, staff compliance, cost, reimbursement, coordination between the hub and sites, patient experience, and any other telemedicine related matters should be discussed and resolved at this meeting.

2. **Establish strong physician leadership to advocate and provide telemedicine services.** The steering committee should include physician leaders known by the medical staff for their commitment to improving the patient care experience and to the implementation of innovative care delivery systems. Committed physician leadership with strong communication and conflict resolution skills will provide the medical staff personnel needed to introduce, implement, and embrace telemedicine among the organization’s practitioners. These physician leaders will need to identify the medical staff members who have the skills to manage patients via the telemedicine system in a manner that ensures a seamless interaction between the patient and physician. The patient should feel like the interaction was meaningful, addressed their needs, and comparable to an in-person visit.

3. **Identify a telemedicine coordinator to implement, assess, manage, and provide managerial oversight to telemedicine.** The role of telemedicine coordinator is to provide a single point of contact to manage the implementation from testing to ongoing utilization. This coordinator should work with the steering committee to develop all the policies and procedures for the clinical and medical staff members to follow when using the telemedicine system. They should also be responsible for executing the project plan, managing deadlines, troubleshooting equipment issues, and accessing technical support as well as
responding to any concerns while telemedicine is adopted by the organization. This position will act as a change agent among staff members and should be responsible for the education and training on the system.

4. **Recruit and train staff who are interested in the implementation and utilization of telemedicine.** Identify or recruit staff members who are eager to embrace a new model of healthcare delivery. Look for staff members who feel comfortable using the technology, as well as working with patients via a computer monitor. As part of recruitment and training processes, ask staff to participate on mock sessions. During these sessions, staff member should be evaluated on how effective they are in creating a meaningful “live” experience for patients.

5. **Provide a feedback loop and a communication plan for staff and patients.** The organization should create an environment where the staff and patients feel comfortable providing feedback to the coordinator and/or steering committee. All staff involved or impacted by telemedicine should be surveyed frequently in the early stages of adoption and, at a minimum, on an annual basis. In addition, all patients should receive a satisfaction survey at the end of each telemedicine session. The results of the staff and patient surveys should be compiled and presented to the steering committee for discussion and creating a better patient experience and outcome. A communication plan should be developed to share success stories and challenges that have been identified and already addressed. By creating and promoting this level of commitment to feedback and action, staff members and patients will participate in the development and possible growth of telemedicine within the organization.

For more information on how to implement a telemedicine system, please contact Anna Grellert at 424.201.3983 or agrellert@thecamdengroup.com