

One Year After Adoption, Telehealth's Benefits Reveal Long-Term Staying Power

BOLINGBROOK, Ill., April 20, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- In late March 2020, [ATI Physical Therapy](#) (ATI), one of the nation's largest providers of physical therapy (PT) services, launched its telehealth platform [CONNECT™](#). As an essential health care provider during the pandemic, the new virtual platform gave patients a viable option to safely continue with their treatments. Taking into account all healthcare providers, telehealth adoption increased 154% during the last week of March 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.¹ Telehealth continues to prove itself beneficial beyond its originally intended uses and is expected to continue as a prominent means of care beyond the pandemic for the industry.

CONNECT was launched under the presumption that virtual PT sessions would be most effective for non-operative patients; patients with lower pain and disability levels; and patients further along in their recovery journey. However, after treating patients through more than 43,000 virtual visits in the year since CONNECT's launch,² ATI has learned telehealth benefits a significantly larger population of patients with a broader range of conditions and pain levels than it first anticipated. For a technology that experienced slow adoption throughout healthcare prior to the pandemic, telehealth is now widely embraced by providers in every corner of the industry.

"Patients with any diagnosis and of any age can benefit from telehealth," said Mirette Mikhail, PT, DPT, CEIS, MTC, CertDN, Clinic Director at ATI Physical Therapy's Downers Grove, Illinois clinic. "I've virtually treated an extremely wide range of patients this year – from young patients recovering from a sports injury to people with aches from uncomfortable work-from-home set-ups to a Medicare patient who recovered from total shoulder surgery. Telehealth is for everyone."

ATI expected younger patients to be the primary telehealth users when CONNECT first launched due to the technology platform; yet, most CONNECT patients over the last year have been older adults, Mikhail noted. These patients were the ones most at risk of COVID, so they opted for safety with virtual therapy. For example, Marian, a South Carolina patient, required PT after a back injury and being a high-risk individual soon transitioned from in-person to virtual care. Through CONNECT appointments conducted three times a week, Marian improved her condition quickly, progressing from having pain getting out of bed in November 2020, to walking miles on a regular basis in March 2021.

Beyond the ability to receive treatment in the safety of their own homes, ATI patients see convenience as one of the most prominent benefits of telehealth. Virtual appointments allow patients to access their therapist from anywhere, leading to more consistent care regimens and faster recovery times.

"I actually preferred telehealth to in-person appointments because of my busy schedule," said Analisa, a 35-year-old patient in Illinois who was treated via CONNECT after fracturing her shoulder. "I did virtual PT longer than I would've done in-person because it was so easy and flexible. The level of convenience and efficiency of telehealth is unparalleled."

After the threat of COVID ceases, ATI will continue to offer CONNECT due to the positive feedback received from patients and therapists alike. Included in ATI's plans is the use of telehealth to treat patients in medical deserts – regions with inadequate access to healthcare – to further access to healthcare needs through PT.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, telehealth provided safety from COVID, alleviated the burden on hospitals and doctors' offices, and allowed for continuity of care when treatment otherwise would have stopped. Now, we see telehealth's greatest benefit: accessibility," said Dr. Chuck Thigpen, Ph.D., PT, ATC and Senior Director of Practice Innovation and Analytics at ATI. "Telehealth makes physical therapy even more approachable, affordable and favorable than it already is. While telehealth does not replace the much-needed hands-on treatment that help produce the best outcomes for our patients, it's a convenient alternative when in-clinic appointments aren't an option, whether it's because of the pandemic, weather or a busy day. With all these benefits, there's no doubt telehealth is here to stay."

About ATI Physical Therapy


At ATI Physical Therapy, we are passionate about potential. Every day, we restore it in our patients and activate it in our team members in close to 900 locations across the U.S. With proven results from more than 2.5 million unique patient episodes, ATI is leading the industry by setting best practice standards that deliver predictable outcomes for our patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) issues. ATI's offerings span the healthcare spectrum for MSK-related issues. From preventative services in the workplace and athletic training support to home health, outpatient clinical services and online physical therapy via its online platform, [CONNECT™](#), a complete list of our service offerings can be found at [ATIpt.com](#). ATI is based in Bolingbrook, Illinois.

¹ [Trends in the Use of Telehealth During the Emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, January–March 2020](#), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 30, 2020.

² Data from April 1, 2020 to March 30, 2021, ATI Physical Therapy.

SOURCE ATI Physical Therapy

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