

Press Release – For immediate release

Patients Embrace Telehealth During the Pandemic How to Get the Most from Your Virtual Visit

(New York City. April 13, 2020.) During the coronavirus pandemic, many doctors' offices are closed for non-emergency care and more patients are embracing telemedicine. Dr. Geoffrey Westrich, an orthopedic surgeon at Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), has seen an uptick in virtual consultations among both established and new patients.

Thirty-three-year-old Nick Clement had an appointment at Dr. Westrich's office on the last day it was open in early March, but given the choice, he opted for a virtual consultation. He said his online follow-up appointment after knee replacement was easy to set up, and it worked well. He was even able to show Dr. Westrich his knee.

It's not only established patients opting for telehealth. Since virtual appointments became available last month, Dr. Westrich has consulted with several new patients seeking an orthopedic surgeon for a hip or knee replacement. Although they can't have the surgery right away, they're planning ahead, according to Dr. Westrich, who is director of research in the Adult Reconstruction and Joint Replacement Service at HSS.

"They've already been told that the best option for pain relief is a knee or hip replacement," Dr. Westrich explains. "Although elective surgeries, including joint replacement, are now on hold in the New York metro area, patients can get the ball rolling by scheduling a virtual visit." In addition to being able to meet a doctor online and have a remote consultation, patients can send medical records, x-rays and MRIs to the physician.

In appropriate cases, patients can receive a tentative date for an in-office consultation once it reopens for non-emergency care. "Many patients are relieved to know that once the pandemic ends and we start performing elective surgeries again at HSS, they will be at or near the top of the list," Dr. Westrich says.

For a someone considering surgery, a virtual consultation is also a good way to get to know a physician, according to Dr. Westrich. "A patient can see if the physician inspires confidence, takes the time to answer questions, and takes a genuine interest in the patient and his or her concerns," he says.

To make the most out of a virtual medical consultation, Dr. Westrich has this advice for patients:

- Test the visual quality of your webcam and the sound quality of your microphone before the virtual visit.

- Make sure you have a good Internet connection.
- Plug in your computer or mobile device so it doesn't run out of power.
- Set up the camera at eye level so it is easier for the doctor to see and engage with you.
- Close unnecessary programs. Having too many programs running on your computer or device can strain its memory and reduce the quality of your video consultation.
- Find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted.
- Look into the camera and stay close to your device so the doctor can see and hear you.
- Before the consultation, write down your symptoms, any medications you are taking, previous consultations you have had regarding your health issue, dates and types of previous surgeries, and any prior hospitalizations.
- Write down your questions in advance. If you have a concern, don't be afraid to discuss it with during the consultation.
- If the doctor gives you instruction, repeat them back to him or her to make sure you understand them.

Anyone interested in setting up a virtual consultation with Dr. Westrich is invited to call his office: 212-606-1510.