HOW TO CHOOSE A TELENEUROLOGY PARTNER:
21 ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL CRITERIA

A successful teleNeurology program begins with consideration of a myriad of details that can seem overwhelming. This checklist will help you make sure you address the most important criteria as you evaluate your options.
1. ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

The Joint Commission accreditation offers advantages. First, you can be assured that the vendor meets the same high standards as your hospital, such as focused and ongoing professional practice evaluations to assess a practitioner’s clinical competence and professional behavior when credentialing physicians. Also, health care organizations that are accredited by the Joint Commission are committed to reach zero harm through high reliability science. This involves a commitment to improve processes that result in better outcomes, training staff to lead improvement projects, mentoring leaders as they create vibrant improvement, establishing a strong safety culture, and more.

The URAC accreditation seal marks an organization as going above and beyond regulatory compliance in telehealth operations. Developed in partnership with the American Telemedicine Association, URAC standards are evidenced-based, generally accepted guidelines specific for telemedicine services. The prime directive of these standards is to promote safe, quality, competent healthcare regardless of the telemedicine model, modality or service being provided to patients. Further, URAC accreditation ensures a strong billing process and confidence that your vendor can provide accurate and timely billing and collection services.

Finally, experienced vendors will offer PMP-certified teams to oversee hospital implementations and go-lives.

2. COMPREHENSIVE QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Another indicator of quality is a comprehensive clinical quality management program that supports evidence-based practices, monitors compliance with these evidence-based practices, and encourages continuous telemedicine services improvement.

3. PHYSICIAN LICENSING, CREDENTIALING, AND PRIVILEGING

You will want to confirm that your vendor provides primary source-verified credentialing, licensing, and privileging that allows for credentialing by proxy to make your job easier.
4. CLIENT SUCCESS

The vendor should provide a main point of contact to ensure program success. This trusted advisor should help manage the day-to-day communication and rapid resolution of service requests and inquiries at your organization, saving your team a significant amount of time. Regular status calls, along with a mix of monthly, quarterly and annual business reviews can help provide the tools and support needed to maximize your program. A dedicated advocate with deep understanding of your overall vision and goals will help you analyze reports and metrics to ensure desired outcomes are achieved and clinical, operational and financial goals are met.

CLINICAL AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

5. BOARD CERTIFICATION AND FELLOWSHIP TRAINING

It is a given that your teleNeurologists should be board-certified. Beyond this, look for seasoned neurologists with years of experience under their belts as well as board-certification and/or fellowship training in sub-specialties such as vascular neurology, neurophysiology, neuromuscular or epilepsy.

6. CLINICAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Vendors with deep experience and services will have robust programs for physician recruitment, training, credentialing, onboarding and evaluation; hospital performance analysis; and more.

7. AVERAGE TIME TO VIDEO (RESPONSE TIME)

How long does it take from the time the consult request is placed to the time the physician is on video? The answer will depend on the individual circumstances of each case and can vary widely, from two minutes to 45 minutes. However, the average time to video should be relatively low, say, under 15 minutes.

When assessing response time, keep in mind that claims of short response times may be misleading. Is the physician on video or on a phone? Did the physician have to wait for images? Response time involves multiple activities and personnel. What matters is how quickly the telePhysician can respond to evaluate the patient and collaborate with on-site staff on the necessary treatment plan and care.

8. THROMBOLYTIC RATES

Verify that all stroke patients who arrive within the 4.5-hour window of eligibility to receive tPA are actually having it administered. Keep in mind that a significant percentage of those patients may not be candidates because they have a bleeding stroke, are taking anticoagulants, have had recent surgery, or other factors. Compare the thrombolytic rates of vendors.
9. PEER REVIEW AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Quality practice management may include a leadership council made up of physicians who practice in the specialty areas for which services are provided. This council can oversee all quality standards and provide peer reviews of the specialists, set metrics for quality, develop procedure standards and documentation standards, and review processes. A clinician management system should also be in place to monitor physician performance and provide evaluations much like an annual performance review.

10. DOCUMENTATION

Documentation and reporting are key to ensuring quality. Make sure your vendor has high clinical documentation standards to ensure thorough documentation of teleNeurology consults.

OPERATIONS

11. CENTRALIZED CONSULT DISPATCH

When an acute neurology case arises and you need to set up a teleNeurology consult, having a 24/7/365 centralized coordination center makes a huge difference. This service will eliminate individual answering services and act as a liaison to find and dispatch the consult request to the appropriate neurologist who is available and privileged for your facility.

12. CONSULT LIAISON SERVICES

In addition to dispatching physicians, look for coordination services for all activities. The coordination center acts as a patient advocate to the hospital and the teleNeurologist’s eyes and ears to confirm that the patient is ready for an evaluation, CT images have been requested, the video cart is available, and more.
13. INTELLIGENCE-DRIVEN NEUROLOGIST SCHEDULING

Ask vendors how they match physicians to consults. Those that use AI-driven algorithms can take in information from multiple systems and aggregate it for intelligent matching. The system can identify availability based on multiple factors:

- Physicians on shift
- Physicians who have privileges who are currently active, in process, or handling another consultation and may not be available right now but may become available shortly
- Physicians who are off shift but are available if there is a surge of consultations

In addition, the system should use predictive analytics to forecast longer term supply and demand based on historical data to ensure there are enough physicians available when needed—but not too many.

14. TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Integration of the vendor telemedicine platform with your EMR system can help the entire care team. In addition, healthcare facilities should be able to request consults directly from their EMR system or any web-enabled device.

15. DELIVERY OF CARE FLEXIBILITY

Look for a vendor that gives you options. You should be able to choose whether to use the technology platform, the coordination center, and the vendor’s specialists or your own in any combination. Ask your vendor if you are able to use coordination services only on certain days or certain times when your own staff can’t handle the demand or a staff member may be on leave and be sure you’re able to shift coverage services quickly and easily.

16. REPORTING AND ANALYTICS

When it comes to reporting, here are some metrics vendors should offer: Types of consults; physicians’ consult diagnosis impressions; door-to-needle time summarized and by consult; detail, total volume of cases and a break-down by emergent and inpatient; and service level agreement compliance percentage, including a breakdown of response times.

Additional analytics can help you see how your hospital compares to others based on region, stroke center designation, bed size, patient demographics, and more.
17. IN-HOUSE BILLING AND REIMBURSEMENT

Some vendors assign the physicians' rights to the hospital to bill. Look for a vendor with in-house billing and reimbursement services that are purpose-built for telemedicine. Telemedicine has specific regulations that, if not followed, could result in unintended fraud and Medicare, Medicaid and commercial insurers demanding overpayment refunds.

PLATFORM AND TECHNOLOGY

18. PLATFORM FLEXIBILITY

Don’t get trapped into technology that doesn’t adapt to your needs. Look for a platform that can be used by the vendor’s team of specialists, your own physicians, an outside specialists group practice, or any combination.

19. CONFIGURABLE CLINICAL WORKFLOWS

You should also have flexibility that allows configurable clinical workflows to customize and optimize services for your specific offerings.

20. HITRUST CERTIFICATION

Look for HITRUST certification that ensures your vendor meets all HIPAA security and privacy standards.

21. TRACK RECORD

How many telemedicine consults has the platform handled? An acute teleNeurology program is too important to trust to unproven technology. Look for a platform that has proven its reliability.
THE SOC TELEMED DIFFERENCE

SOC Telemed offers unmatched clinical experience and expertise in clinical and operational workflows. Consult Coordination Center professionals ensure immediate access to specialists—our clinicians or yours. Plus, our team provides ongoing support through physician onboarding and evaluation, hospital performance analysis, recommendations, and more. We're the nation's largest provider of acute telemedicine solutions to hospitals, health systems, post-acute providers, physician networks, and value-based care organizations.

To get more detailed information on the critical factors to ensure the success of your teleNeurology program, check out:

THE GURU’S GUIDE TO ACUTE CARE TELEMEDICINE: EXPERT ADVICE FOR HEALTHCARE LEADERS