



MIGRAINE WORLD SUMMIT

INTERVIEWS WITH WORLD-LEADING EXPERTS

TRANSCRIPT



**MIGRAINE CARE FOR BUSY PEOPLE:
NEW ONLINE HEALTH SOLUTIONS**

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[AMGEN-SPONSORED TALK]



Introduction (00:05): Sometimes we feel that we are too busy to properly care for our health. But when it comes to migraine, it is essential that we stay on top of strategies to manage our migraine to keep it from worsening. What are our options for care when we have hectic schedules? Is telemedicine a good option? Dr. Zubair Ahmed is an assistant professor of neurology at the Cleveland Clinic, who specializes in the care of migraine. He is here to talk about how it is easier than ever to prioritize our health with new online health solutions. Let's jump right into the questions.

Question (00:40): Some people postpone seeing a doctor because they are too busy. Is that a risky decision?

Dr. Ahmed (00:45): Well, it's important because migraine and headaches tend to be a stigmatized condition, which means that a lot of folks feel that, "Look, I have a headache. I'm going to get over it. It's something I can push off; it's not that disabling; it's not something I have to worry about; it's something that I can, again, just get over." But we know that migraine is one of the most disabling conditions. And what that means is that it has a significant impact on our daily life: It affects our interactions with our family; it affects our interaction with work. And oftentimes, we may find that we're missing work or missing important family events. So postponing care means that, again, we're not getting the care that we need, and we all want to live a very fulfilling life where we're there for the people that need us. And so, obtaining care at the right time is important because it will help us minimize the amount of disability that headaches are associated with — they're considered one of, again, one of the most disabling conditions. Some even consider it the sixth most disabling condition in the world. Again, it's something that affects people that are young and healthy or active. It often affects women, and they have a busy lifestyle with work and with taking care of families. And so again, it's important for us to be there for our families and for our friends. And seeking care earlier helps us to meet the engagements and the responsibilities that we have.

Question (02:08): Other people don't see a doctor because they don't know of one trained in treating migraine. Any recommendations?

Dr. Ahmed (02:15): I would start with your primary care physician because they may be able to refer you to a neurologist, or a headache specialist, or a headache center. However, if your primary care physician is not quite certain of who to refer you to, another option to in-person visits is telemedicine. Telemedicine refers to a visit that's done through the computer, and it can be done — it doesn't have to be in person. So, the advantage of this is that it allows patients access to specialists who are not physically close by. The specialists may be hours away in some situations, maybe even out of state. So, there are very few headache specialists, relatively speaking, but this would be one option to take advantage of a specialist expertise, particularly when it comes to headache and migraine.

Question (03:10): Why is it important to focus on your own healthcare needs before taking care of others?

Dr. Ahmed (03:15): For us to be able to take care of our loved ones, we have to be healthy. And in order for us to be healthy, we have to seek care. And it's not easy — we all do have busy schedules. You know, I have migraine, and I also have three children — now my son's 7, and he gets headaches. So, you know, it's not uncommon for someone to have a headache at some point in the house. But it's important for us to take care of that early on. And if we're not taking care of it, then it's going to affect our life. And maybe he's not able to attend practice, or I'm not



able to focus on my family the way I need to focus on them. So again, it's important to focus because ... if I'm healthy, then I can take care of those that I love. If I'm not healthy and I'm having a migraine, I'm not able to take care of my family. So, if I focus on my health, it's important because other folks depend on me.

Question (04:06): If you are seeing a doctor, how do you know if they offer telemedicine?

Dr. Ahmed (04:10): The first thing would be to ask them; many physicians will advertise it on their website. Sometimes ... after you've seen them the first time in person, you can even go ahead and schedule it through MyChart — that's how we do it at the Cleveland Clinic. So, the main thing here is good communication. I think that many places, especially post-COVID, are offering telehealth. So, if you don't ask, you won't know: So make sure you ask.

Question (04:37): How else is telemedicine currently offered?

Dr. Ahmed (04:40): We have a couple different programs at the Cleveland Clinic. One is a virtual eight-week program in which patients meet with a provider once a week for eight weeks. And during that eight-week period, different aspects of managing headaches — whether that be medications or diet or lifestyle or exercise or sleep — these are all addressed sequentially. So that's a very comprehensive-type program. That's a little bit more than what you would get at a general one-hour telemedicine-type visit.

Question (05:09): Can you see doctors out of state? What about internationally?

Dr. Ahmed (05:14): I would say, you know, for the patients that I see — ballpark — 40% of them are coming from out of state. So ... generally the first time I see a patient, I do like to see them in person because I can do a fundoscopic exam — I can look in the back of [a] patient's eyes — because sometimes there are other conditions that are important to rule out that you can't do without doing a comprehensive exam, which we wouldn't be able to do via telemedicine. However, if it's a very standard migraine, sometimes even the first visit can be virtual. And so, for folks who are coming [from] out of state, it becomes more of a question about what are the rules and regulations. And it varies from state to state. Generally — currently, we are seeing new patients who are in the state. If somebody is coming from out of state, they would first have to make an in-person appointment. And then subsequently, they might be able to do telemedicine visits. With regards to international patients, that's a whole different ballgame, because reimbursement varies a lot from country to country. And a lot of that will depend on the rules and regulations dictating the specific country that is sending the patient over: So that I can speak less about.

Question (06:31): Why is telemedicine often suitable for patients with migraine?

Dr. Ahmed (06:35): The first question is: If we take a step back ... who does migraine affect? Migraine generally affects women who are otherwise healthy, between the ages of 20 and 40 years old. So, migraine affects folks who are very productive; they're very generally very healthy; they're active; they're working individuals; they have a busy lifestyle, and a busy family. And so because of that, they may not have as much time to drive to a headache center to get the specialty-type care that they need. And in that situation, it makes it much more reasonable to be able to take advantage of telemedicine because then you don't have to drive to, maybe, the local city that's two hours away that might have a headache specialist. So, it becomes much



more advantageous because you can save a lot of time. Secondly, if we're doing this during work, generally we don't want to have to take off an entire day of work to see a provider.

Dr. Ahmed (07:28): And so, this allows us the opportunity to maybe take an hour off at lunch and to see our provider, our ... physician, headache specialist during a lunch hour, for example — or maybe before work or after work. And we all — we are offering extended hours for patients who do have busy lifestyles and busy schedules. So it just makes it much more convenient. We can see physicians when we need to; if we're running late or if the physician is running late, again, it makes it a little bit easier when it's virtually because there are other tasks that we might be able to do in the meantime. So there are a lot of different reasons why telemedicine is optimal for folks who have migraine.

Question (08:06): In what circumstances is it wise to get telemedicine care and when should you be seen in person?

Dr. Ahmed (08:13): Well, I feel that if you notice that you're having neurological symptoms in addition to your headache. For example: If you're noticing vision problems, or you're noticing problems with balance, or numbness, and tingling, or weakness, those are all excellent reasons to seek care in person. However, if you have a migraine — a severe throbbing headache associated with light and sound sensitivity — and there aren't any other any other symptoms that are associated with that, and it's more [of a] run-of-the-mill migraine, it runs in your family, it's been going on for years and years and years, then those are all reasons where a virtual visit, or a telemedicine visit, may be appropriate.

Question (08:53): Can you switch to telemedicine after you've established with a provider in person?

Dr. Ahmed (08:58): Oh, absolutely. And I think that's really probably the gold standard at this point: Where if you see someone and as long as your headache remains consistent, it would be reasonable to see your physician in a telemedicine format. However, if new symptoms develop, or the headache changes in its pattern, then again, that might be a reason to go ahead and reestablish an in-person visit.

Question (09:23): How do you know if the quality of care you are receiving is good enough?

Dr. Ahmed (09:29): And I think the question I would ask myself is: "How am I doing? Am I missing time from family? Am I missing time away from work?" If it's affecting my quality of life, then I know that I need something in addition to what I'm already receiving. And so, if it really feels like it's affecting an individual, if you're keeping a diary and you notice that, "Gosh, I'm having a lot more headaches than I thought I was," then that tells me that ... maybe we need to look at other strategies.

Question (09:55): How can you maximize the time in a telemedicine visit?

Dr. Ahmed (09:58): The first thing I would do is for any visit: I would spend a little bit of time thinking of the questions I want to ask my physician, my neurologist; I would spend time researching different treatments that I want to discuss. I think if we have an organized outline when you're going into your doctor visit, then again, the visit is going to be much more efficient.

Question (10:21): What kind of migraine treatments can you get via telemedicine?



Dr. Ahmed (10:25): I offer the exact same migraine treatments that I offer in person. And so, anything that I can offer in person, I can offer through a telemedicine visit. And so, most of my prescriptions are — all my prescriptions are sent electronically to [the] patient's pharmacy. Sometimes that's a home delivery pharmacy — so sometimes patients are getting medications delivered directly to their home; they don't even have to go, and pick them up from a pharmacy — other times it's a local pharmacy that's close by. So whatever treatments we can offer in person — pharmacological treatments — we can certainly offer those via telemedicine, as well.

Question (11:02): Do healthcare plans cover telemedicine visits?

Dr. Ahmed (11:06): You know, we don't know, to be honest. That is a piece of legislature that's been pushed off most recently. And so, we will have to wait to see whether that's something that's going to be covered by Medicare in the future— and most insurances will follow the dictates of Medicare. I'm hopeful that it will be covered because it's such a value to our patients, and it's a value for us also. We want patients to get care efficiently and effectively, and telemedicine is certainly a way to do that.

Question (11:36): How is payment handled if insurance doesn't cover the visit?

Dr. Ahmed (11:40): We will bill insurances, and so some insurances will cover them. We do offer a flat fee also, so if some patients want they can just pay an out-of-pocket expense for it.

Question (11:53): What about prescription refills?

Dr. Ahmed (11:55): Yeah, so refills can be obtained through messaging your established provider or your physician. And that comes to me electronically, and I go ahead and refill it on an automatic, almost, basis. Sometimes pharmacies — pharmacies will automatically send you that information when they notice that a patient may be running low on a medication. And so that's probably the most efficient way.

Question (12:20): Can devices be obtained online as well?

Dr. Ahmed (12:23): Yes. A lot of devices vary; not many devices unfortunately are covered by insurances but devices can be obtained similarly. I can write out an electronic script for a device, and oftentimes there's a form that needs to be filled out online. And there are a number of different devices that have been approved for migraine. And so, that also can be done via telemedicine.

Question (12:47): Any other practical tips for people with hectic schedules?

Dr. Ahmed (12:52): Well, I think the important thing here — and the takeaway — is to prioritize your health. Because if we prioritize our health, we will find that it'll have benefits later on. Like anything else in life, I think oftentimes, you know, we have busy schedules, so we prioritize everything except for our own health. But once we're healthy, once we're active, we can certainly help those around us. But if we're not healthy ourselves, then it makes it more challenging for us to engage and live a meaningful life. So, the key here is really to prioritize ourselves because while we are helping others — and that is important — it's certainly important to take care of ourselves, as well.