Editor's note: National Quality Forum (NQF) issued two new reports this week that provide guidance to advance health information technology, with the intent of making healthcare more effective and safer for all Americans.

The terms “telemedicine” and “telehealth” have been used interchangeably in healthcare, but there is a difference. Telemedicine is considered the clinical application of technology, while telehealth encompasses a broader, consumer-facing approach — “a collection of means or methods, not a specific clinical service, to enhance care delivery and education,” according to the federal network of telehealth resource centers.
Telehealth is not a new concept. In 1925, Hugo Gernsback developed a concept for a teledactyl, a tool that used robot-like fingers along with radio technology to examine a patient from a distance via a video feed. Unfortunately, this tool was never actually produced, but rather predicted as a future path for medicine.

According to the American Telemedicine Association (ATA), telehealth has four primary benefits:

1. Improves patient access
2. Reduces cost
3. Improves quality and safety
4. Improves patient satisfaction

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