

# A Network of Online Dermatologists

An Interview with Douglas Holmes, Chief Executive Officer, DermatologistOnCall

**EDITORS' NOTE** Douglas Holmes is Chief Executive Officer of DermatologistOnCall (DOC), the largest network of board-certified dermatologists providing telemedicine service in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. He has held this position since his appointment by the Board of Directors in December 2018. During his tenure as CEO, DermatologistOnCall's annual revenues have more than doubled and are projected to sustain, if not exceed, this growth rate in 2021. Holmes started his investment banking career at Lazard Freres and Credit Suisse/First Boston. He subsequently was a co-founder of the Cleveland investment banking firm Carleton, McCreary, Holmes & Co. He has advised on more than 300 transactions over a 40-year career. He serves, or has served, on the boards of eight public and private companies and is a founding partner of a private equity firm and a mezzanine capital house. Holmes earned his B.A. from Kenyon College and an M.B.A. from Dartmouth's Amos Tuck School of Business Administration.



Douglas Holmes

## Will you provide an overview of DermatologistOnCall and how you define its mission?

We have built the largest online platform of its kind in the nation with board-certified dermatologists in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The high quality of the care, the convenience for patients of being able to communicate with a doctor online rather than going in for a face-to-face visit, the speed with which patients receive their diagnoses and prescriptions – all these factors have made

large insurance companies, hospital systems and corporations around the country want to work with us.

## How does an online patient visit work?

A visit with a DOC provider mimics the flow of an in-office appointment. Patients fill out an online form and submit photos of the skin area in question. They can select the provider they want, or they may enter a general online waiting room and one of our board-certified doctors will handle their case. Because dermatologists are trained in using pictures, diagnosing conditions based on images is second nature, and our process ensures that a physician has every detail he or she needs to offer an accurate diagnosis and to develop a custom treatment plan. Whether patients are seeing one of our dermatologists for the first time or dealing with their own long-term provider, they get high-quality, comprehensive care and an excellent “web-side” experience. We guarantee treatment within three days, but the average time

is just 15 hours. That's remarkable when you consider the typical wait time to see a dermatologist is 32 days.

Let me add on a very practical level that taking photos of a troubled skin area yourself is a lot more congenial for many patients than having to undress for a doctor. That may not be something people will tell you upfront, but it is a very human reaction, and it is, we believe, another reason why telemedicine for dermatological care is growing rapidly in popularity.

## What differentiates DermatologistOnCall in the industry?

The greatest differentiating factor is the high standard we set for the quality of care. We have invested more time, money and energy in developing our platform and building our network of dermatologists than anyone else in this field, and we work without letup to maintain our high standards. I would add that because we have built our platform with such attention to detail, it is highly scalable – the potential for growth is enormous and the motivation for increasing numbers of dermatologists to become part of our network is equally great. That, I would say, is a very large part of the DermatologistOnCall advantage. Additionally, continuity of care is rare in telemedicine, especially across systems that support direct-to-consumer medical services. Care on our platform is not limited to a single visit; patients may select any dermatologist licensed in their state at any time. Additionally, they may move between virtual care and brick-and-mortar care when deemed appropriate by the dermatologist. With

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patient consent, treatment records can be sent securely to a primary care physician, ensuring their care team is informed of all treatments and reducing system fragmentation.

**How has DermatologistOnCall’s business been impacted by the pandemic?**

I say this with no sense of satisfaction, but under the circumstances our business has boomed. In April when the stay-at-home directives really took hold, we had the largest number of visits to the portal in our history. We became an essential service. Today our business is double what it was in the pre-pandemic era, and it is still increasing. It is not just patients who are benefiting from the ability we provide to get care without leaving their homes. For doctors, our platform is a powerful tool to maintain their patient populations, so that is a great inducement to become part of our network. We are also seeing strong growth in our partnerships with some of the biggest names in healthcare. They are coming to us because we are the largest network of its kind in the nation and they want to take advantage of our system.

We are also seeing growth in yet another area. We don’t allow advertising on our platform, but we do allow organizations to post information. That has attracted some of the largest and most prestigious companies to offer over-the-counter and prescription dermatology solutions on the website. We have also seen strong interest coming from large consumer-brand cosmetic companies that are seeking the opportunity to educate our various audiences on their options in skin care.

**Will you highlight the strength of the providers that work with DermatologistOnCall?**

All DermatologistOnCall providers are U.S. board-certified dermatologists who undergo a rigorous approval process as a prerequisite to joining our network. Not only are they all highly-qualified physicians, but many are also specialists in particular areas of dermatology. Our patients can select providers based on subspecialties like pediatrics, skin cancer, or LGBTQ+ care. Many of our dermatologists are not only practicing on our platform, but heading departments at their respective institutions, leading research projects in the field, and offering thought leadership in organizations like the American Academy of Dermatology and through their own media channels.

They are also subject to continuing review by our Chief Medical Officer, so the high quality of care provided by an excellent group of dermatologists never diminishes. It’s important to point out, too, that DOC was founded by a dermatologist who had more than 20 years in practice at the time. He got the idea when he was at a soccer game for one of his four children and received nine phone calls from patients in less than an hour. As he said later, “I was talking to them, calling in prescriptions and giving medical advice over the phone.” That gave him the idea for giving patients access to dermatologic care any time of day, any day of the week, from any device. The upshot from that long-ago soccer game is a faster, more convenient way for providers to connect with and care for patients.

**Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for DermatologistOnCall?**

The potential for growth is enormous. Because we deliver specialty care, partnering with like-minded organizations such as payers, hospital systems, and other medical networks, or retailers offering dermatology-related goods and services offers a tremendous opportunity to evangelize our services. We’ve already found our partnerships to be incredibly successful - not just for us, but for the partner as well. Moving forward, working with other well-known organizations interested in delivering dermatology care through telemedicine will be instrumental to our growth.

**What are your key priorities for DermatologistOnCall as you look to the future?**

Speed of care is a crucial element in dermatology and therefore a major element of our vision for the future. Waiting too long to see a dermatologist when you have a skin cancer may be life-threatening, yet people can wait for up to 90 days for an appointment. That’s true if you live in a rural area with very few dermatologists around and possibly a two-hour drive to see one, or if you live in Miami where there are great numbers of dermatologists but demand is exceptionally high. There’s no wait with us. Maintaining fast, high-quality medical care like that is at the core of our mission and therefore will always be one of our highest priorities. So, too, is growing our network of doctors, increasing the number of patients they serve, and expanding the network of hospitals, healthcare and health-service providers we are in partnership with.

We are very proud of what we are achieving and very optimistic about the future. ●

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