

# Network News



**EASTERN  
MONTANA  
TELEMEDICINE  
NETWORK**



## Monitoring Oncology Study Participants

With the diagnosis of cancer, many treatment options are considered. One of the choices involves participating in a research study specific to the type of cancer, originating site and cancer cell type. The research option offers additional hope and potential improved prognoses for many Billings Clinic patients.

Frequent monitoring of blood work and evaluating side effects on a scheduled basis are a part of research protocols. The lab work and chemotherapy administration can be accomplished in rural communities throughout the state. Access to the oncologist is a critical part of treatment. Oncologist appointments are completed in Outreach Clinics and over interactive videoconferencing.

An oncologist in Billings reviews lab work, vital signs, side effects and surgical or port sites via telemedicine. The patient has a health care provider present to report any additional concerns or assessments and receive orders for the next chemotherapy to be administered to the patient.

Christi Fox, clinical study coordinator, notes the value of the telemedicine contact, "Telemedicine has helped me monitor my oncology research patients, stay within study parameters and ensure their safety is number one while participating in a clinical trial."

Glasgow patient, Carol Bucheit, completed her final chemotherapy treatment December 24<sup>th</sup>. When asked to comment on care over telemedicine, Carol states, "It helps coordinate my time better and doesn't make me interrupt my life as much. It helped me stay on track and be able to give myself my final chemo the day before Christmas as a Christmas present. I'm so glad I did."

She plans to return to snow skiing in February and asked her oncologist for guidance. Dr. Roger Santala was quick to demonstrate some conditioning exercises via telemedicine to prepare her for the slopes. Assessment, education, personal connection and prescribing treatment are accomplished over hundreds of miles through telemedicine technology.

## Three New Telemedicine Providers

Dr. Samuel Reck, dermatologist, Dr. Bruno Oliveira, rheumatologist, and Dr. Barbara Dudczak, cardiologist saw their first patients over telemedicine in December. Successful consults were provided to patients in Glasgow, Livingston and Miles City.

If you have a need for a specialty consult, please contact the telemedicine office at 406-657-4870 to determine if a telemedicine consult is appropriate.

## Laboratory Employees Keep Current with ABLÉ Lecture Series

In July of 1994, a dedicated group of medical technologists began monthly meetings to expand their knowledge in the area of laboratory testing and evaluation. The initial meetings were held at noon featuring a presenter connecting over a speaker phone. The presentation was taped and replayed for those unable to attend. The Association for Billings Laboratory Education (ABLE) group has grown from these simple beginnings.

Within three short years of those initial audio conferences, the group "went live" with interactive videoconferencing beginning in the fall of 1997. Attendees can now see, hear and interact with the presenters and other attendees in addition to viewing the in-room visual aides.

The impetus for ABLE came following a State of Montana requirement that Medical Technologists must receive 14 hours of education credits yearly to maintain their state license. ABLE is a coalition of Billings laboratories developed to coordinate educational programs by sharing expenses and providing educational opportunities for their employees. ABLE continues to thrive with leadership from Kathy Johnson, Point of Care Testing Specialist at Billings Clinic and Sharon Stepler at St. Vincent Healthcare. These two women coordinate dates, speakers, and marketing to ensure that quality education is provided to medical technologists in the region.

Topic areas are varied and focus on the effects of disease states or medications on lab results in addition to reviewing the informed medical decisions based on laboratory results. Some of the recent and upcoming topics include laboratory evaluations of infertility, molecular infectious disease, molecular oncology, and molecular genetics evaluations, herpes viruses, methamphetamine, and the hyperbaric oxygen chamber.

Currently the group meets one evening monthly from fall to spring. Host locations rotate between Billings Clinic and St. Vincent Healthcare. If individuals are unable to attend in person, they may receive credit by viewing a copy of a tape or DVD.

Connections are offered to more than 50 locations in rural Montana and Wyoming. After reviewing statistics, Kathy reports that an average of 78 individuals receive credit every month through the ABLE lab series.