

Network News



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TELEMEDICINE
NETWORK**



Telepsychiatry: Pioneers of EMTN

"I have seen (my psychiatrist) over telemedicine for ten years. We have a great relationship. I have not needed hospitalization for that period of time. I get my medication refilled and see the doctor every three months... I don't think there is a thing you could improve. What does (telemedicine) mean to me? It means I don't have to take two days off from work to travel to Billings for a medical appointment." These are comments shared by a patient using telemedicine for mental health care.

Mental illness affects nearly every American family and can occur at any stage of life. It ranks first in the US among illnesses causing disability. Recovery from even the most serious mental illness is possible if patients have access to treatment and support in their communities. In Montana there are currently no psychiatrists practicing east of Billings. Telemedicine decreases feelings of isolation and provides access to mental health care in rural communities.

Since 1993 providers at Billings Clinic Behavioral Health have used telemedicine on a regular basis to provide care to their rural patients. Currently all the psychiatrists and the advanced practice RN provide telepsychiatry care.

Over the past year, several psychiatrists have enjoyed the added convenience of having a desktop videoconferencing unit in their offices. With the equipment in the conference room, the number of available units at Behavioral Health is four. With a total of 1089 mental health visits completed over telemedicine in the last fiscal year, it is a rare day that does not include mental health consults.

Initial patient visits are made in person. The provider offers telemedicine follow-up if they believe it is appropriate and the patient agrees to receiving care in this manner.

Telemedicine offers additional benefits that make a huge impact on quality care, consistency and patient satisfaction.

Psychiatrist Dr. Denegre notes, "While there is a slight decrease in the intimacy of a face to face visit, the benefits to safe care and treatment are overwhelming. One major benefit is that if a patient calls in crisis and lives 5 hours away we might try to change the medicine before having them subjected to the 10 hour round trip. Likewise a patient might be hesitant to call if the call invokes a command to drive the 10 hour round trip. Tele-med removes the obstacle of the long trip, which I imagine is particularly appreciated if someone is struggling."

A patient confirms this observation: "With telemedicine I miss fewer appointments."

EMTN Adds Two Sites

The addition of two new sites to EMTN has increased the number of individual sites to 33. Big Horn Hospital Association in Hardin and McCone County Health Center in Circle are the newest members. Plans for Hardin include increased access to healthcare training and education for the staff with a potential to extend into the medical and mental health visits. Circle has begun with administrative meetings and plans to initiate telepharmacy.

Tumor Board Meets to Plan Top Care

A dedicated group of specialists working in oncology arrive at work by 7AM every Friday to review challenging or unique cases. This multidisciplinary team tackles the details of each individual's disease and treatment. Medical oncologists, patient care navigators, surgeons, primary care providers, oncology research nurses, a radiologist, pathologist, radiation oncologist, cancer registry staff, naturopathic doctor, and other specialists make up this diverse group.

Cases are chosen by physicians and nurses for review. The lab results, scans, pathology, symptom presentation, patient desires and side effects are discussed. Need for further work-up, consensus for best treatment and timing of treatment, and the best location for care are addressed. All ideas are carefully considered by the team and plans for future treatment are discussed and formulated. This group provides education, teaching and feedback from the multiple specialties represented. Cases which have previously been presented may be revisited if new findings occur.

The opportunity to be part of this dynamic group is available across the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network.

Connie Ripley, oncology nurse from Glendive reports: "It (Tumor Board) has helped me better understand the pathology and imaging... with a better understanding of the PET scans I can educate the patients scheduled for them. I have a greater appreciation of the whole team approach to patient care and all the specialties involved. It's really beneficial when the team discusses patients we're seeing in Glendive. I can be more supportive for the patient and family."