

Network News



**EASTERN
MONTANA
TELEMEDICINE
NETWORK**



EMTN- 15 YEARS OF PROVIDING EXCELLENCE IN TELEMEDICINE SERVICES

Beginning as a consortium of six non-profit medical and mental health facilities in 1993, Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network has grown to a nationally recognized telemedicine network serving thousands of patients yearly across Montana and Wyoming.

Partnering with Billings Clinic, five healthcare facilities in Sidney, Culbertson, Glendive and Miles City took the initial steps to develop a statewide network. That dedicated group has expanded to include 33 different locations in 23 communities on the EMTN network.

The initial "mobile unit" weighed 500 pounds and was the size of a side by side refrigerator. This unit was not an ideal clinical unit to bring into the exam rooms for patient consults. However, it did allow for patient consults from larger rooms to providers hundreds of miles away. Today the medical cart footprint is approximately 2X2 feet. The complete unit including the peripheral devices and monitor are now approximately half the weight of the previous model. The original V-Tel equipment was purchased for \$65,000 per unit. Today a high definition medical unit complete with stethoscope and peripheral camera sells for approximately \$17,000.

Statistics from 1995-1996 show a total of 70 conferences a month. Medical visits were 6 percent of the total consults. Mental health visits made up 43 percent. Besides mental health visits the other two top connections were for community development and service. Today total conferences per month hover around 350. The percentage of medical and mental health visits in fiscal year 2008 was 40 and 36 percent respectively.

From a handful of dedicated partners, the EMTN network has grown to include 52 site facilitators, 18 clinical presenters, 80 medical and mental health providers, 4 network staff, a network engineer, a medical director and multiple technical partners. A typical day now might include connections for meetings, educational programs, CD groups, mental health visits, diabetic research, medication assistance and an array of medical consults. New providers for additional services are added monthly.

Dedicated partners, a desire to provide the best care for patients, understanding the power of telemedicine and a commitment to excellence continue to serve as a base to grow the network now and in the future.

**Congratulations Eastern Montana
Telemedicine Network!**

Culbertson Site Facilitator Recalls Early Days of the Network

Vickie Grimsrud, site facilitator from Culbertson, Montana was one of the early pioneers that has remained with the network since its inception. She shared some thoughts regarding telemedicine:

What stood out the most in the early days of telemedicine? *I was sent to a "training session" in Billings for the V-Tel equipment but had no information about it prior to arriving. Imagine my shock when we went through two days of training to be able to talk to people through the TV! No one up here in our corner of the world had ever heard of such a thing. After that there was a television commercial featuring Tom Selleck and AT&T, I believe. The commercial advertised that in the near future you would be able to see who you were talking to on the phone and see the participants at distance meetings. It was so fun to be able to say...we can do that now!*

What were you most excited about with this new technology? *The medical images and slides we sent were great. They were fairly easy to capture once you got the positioning down with the "big fridge" and the document stand. No patients who used it here ever said that they wouldn't use it again instead of traveling.*

What changes have you seen over the past 15 years? *In the beginning, the site facilitators did their own trouble-shooting through telephone calls to the network office. We also did the actual upgrades and installations of new software. I have a box of 13 floppy disks here just for one program installation. Over the years the system seemed to become more "plug & play" and we had less to do with trouble-shooting. Now the EMTN office does all of that remotely! I wish the site facilitators from the early days could see that the statement "All you have to do is turn on the black button" has finally come true!*

What dreams do you have for the next 15 years for telemedicine? *I would like to see people and providers finding telemedicine so mainstream that it becomes the norm and not the exception for medical care. The ability to use telemedicine for distance diagnosis helps tremendously. In the area of long term care, people experience hardships in traveling out of town to see their specialists or mental health providers. I wish that telemedicine use would increase for routine medical visits as well.*