

Network News



**EASTERN
MONTANA
TELEMEDICINE
NETWORK**



Sidney Telemedicine Shines

Affected by the whims of oil and gas exploration and a state leader in sugar beet and oat production, Sidney is a tenacious Montana town. Boasting 450 businesses and a medical center with 15 physicians and specialists, this county seat for Richland County serves nearly 10,000 residents.

To assist local providers in meeting the needs of these residents, Sidney Health Center offers telemedicine consults from regional specialists. These specialists provide care that is not available in eastern Montana. In the past year 19 specialty providers from 10 different areas saw patients in Sidney over telemedicine. Cardiology, oncology, psychiatry, neurology, genetic counseling, oncology research, dermatology, pulmonary, sleep study and rheumatology patients have received care through this technology.

Telemedicine patient, Jim Johnson has the following comments on his telemedicine experience. "I really liked this way of seeing the doctor. There was no trip to Billings. That is a big money savings. The tests and CT scan could be done here (in Sidney). I would like to see more of it. Way to go!"

Telemedicine staff in Sidney includes Shirley Siebenaler, transcriptionist in the rehabilitation department, Nina Reidle, radiology administrative assistant, and Judy Reid LPN. Nina and Shirley ensure that the telemedicine equipment is ready for the consults and assist in showing camera angles that are essential to the provider's evaluation. Judy serves as the medical presenter in the room assisting with vital signs, stethoscopy and medical assessments. In Judy's absence, Kris Selensky RN is ready to assist for medical consults.

Judy Reid has broad and varied experience in nursing. She studied at St. Joseph's Hospital in Dickinson, North Dakota. Judy worked at Poplar Hospital and later moved to the Riverside Clinic. After relocating to Sidney, Judy was employed at the nursing home followed by an OB-GYN office. Most recently she has provided care in the clinic with a nurse practitioner.

Judy enthusiastically advocates for telemedicine. "Telemedicine is exciting for the community and patients and I am happy to be a part of it. At the beginning of a first consult the patients are usually unsure and nervous. By the end of that visit they feel like they have had an in-person consult with the doctor."

The Certified Nurses' Assistants Conference hosted by Billings Clinic and EMTN provided continuing education credits for 90 individuals in 12 communities over telemedicine

Presenters: The Provider's Link to Patients

Questions often arise from those pondering telemedicine medical consults: how is it possible to do an exam from Billings to a rural community over videoconferencing? Can the patient really receive a complete exam over telemedicine? Who are these individuals that assist the providers in ensuring a patient is seen, heard and correctly assessed?

The quiet heroes assisting with telemedicine consults are a group of individuals with education in patient care and additional training in assessment skills. These people are registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants, emergency medical technicians, respiratory therapists and certified medical assistants. Usually employed by their home facilities in one or multiple roles, they have taken on an additional responsibility to be the physical presence of the provider during an exam.

Armed with specific training in a neurology, rheumatology, nephrology, cardiology or ear nose and throat exams, the presenters complete the physical portion of the consult. They demonstrate the patient's range of motion, areas of tenderness, reflexes, visual fields, strength, coordination and edema in addition to other assessments. The providers are able to instruct the presenter in the exam as it progresses. The use of the electronic stethoscope also allows the provider to assess carotid, heart, lung and bowel sounds. The presenter reports symptoms or observations to the provider that may be heard or seen during or prior to the exam.

Skills essential for telemedicine presenters include excellent communication skills, a clinical background, and the ability to work with male, female, elderly and young patients. Being a committed community member, developing strong working relationships with providers, creative thinking skills, and a flexible schedule are also valued. The presenter becomes a telemedicine advocate in their facility and community. They use their assessment skills in their current work environment and are seen as a resource for the telemedicine specialists.

Currently there are 32 presenters on the EMTN network. They meet bimonthly to discuss concerns and give ideas and support to one another. Dian True RN from Cody notes, "With a presenter's assistance, the patients still feel like they have a personal connection during an exam even though the provider is miles away."