

Network News



**EASTERN
MONTANA
TELEMEDICINE
NETWORK**

Billings Clinic.

2008-2009 A YEAR OF GROWTH

Telemedicine has become a buzz word on the national scene. Some of the monies from the economic stimulus package has been targeted to expand telemedicine networks across the country. Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network has been at the forefront of telemedicine for over a decade and continues to improve access and services to patients, providers, administrators and staff.

- From July 1, 2008 though June 30, 2009: EMTN connected 2947 patients to providers for Medical and Mental Health Services.
- High definition monitors were installed throughout the network. A dermatologist using telemedicine to see patients commented on the improved picture quality that will assist in assessment and diagnoses of skin conditions.
- Electronic stethoscopes were deployed to all clinical sites resulting in further assessment opportunities. This additional diagnostic ability has helped to grow clinical offerings.
- Five new cardiology clinics were launched in Glasgow, Sidney, Livingston, Plentywood and Cody.
- Four new sites were added to the network: Dahl Memorial in Ekalaka, Mercy Medical Center in Williston, and PACE locations in Billings and Livingston. All four sites have provided medical services over the telemedicine network.
- A regular neurology clinic was launched in Sidney
- Nine CD groups are offered weekly through Eastern Montana Community Mental Health Center with up to nine sites participating.

In the past year, Billings Clinic saw twelve new providers joining the 50 providers currently using telemedicine. New areas of practice offered by Billings Clinic include genetic consults, naturopathic consults, PACE assessments (Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly) and physical and rehabilitation visits. Over 30 providers from the region also see patients over the EMTN network.

A shift in medical consults has occurred. As the PRISM (Promoting Realistic Individual Self-Management) research project came to a close, clinical numbers have remained strong due to the growth of specialty clinical consults. At the start of the fiscal year, PRISM research patients comprised 48% of the clinical volume. By years end, PRISM patients represented less than 24% of the clinical volume.

The 2947 telemedicine clinical encounters provided patients with an estimated savings of \$1.1 million on out-of-pocket expense.

GOOD FOR PATIENTS, GOOD FOR DOCTOR

Consulting with up to 20 patients a month for follow-up rheumatology visits over telemedicine is standard practice for Dr. Bruno Oliveria. Seeing patients from eleven different communities from Sidney to Bozeman, and Baker to Malta, Dr. Oliveria is perhaps the best traveled "virtual" provider in the state.

A usual day in the office for Dr. Oliveria begins at 8 AM. He may see one or two patients over telemedicine followed by several patients in the clinic. Additional telemedicine visits are interspersed throughout the day. The CERNER schedule notes all patient appointments: telemedicine and office visits. For telemedicine visits, Dr. Oliveria walks into a room in the rheumatology department and dials the patient location from a preset directory. The patient and presenter from the rural site are waiting. Vital signs are reported and a quality of life questionnaire completed by the patient is reviewed. Much like an in-person visit, telemedicine assessments include pain, joint condition, medication side effects, range of motion, and strength testing. Patients have laboratory tests drawn at their local facilities. Results are reviewed for effectiveness of treatment and potential drug toxicity.



"I usually see established patients for routine visits. Stable patients with diagnoses of lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and polymyalgia rheumatica are ideal candidates for telemedicine visits." Dr. Oliveria states.

"For the patient, (telemedicine) is better. They don't need to travel in bad weather or spend extra time on the road...if it is good for the patient, it is good for me!"

***EMTN is now a THREE STATE network:
North Dakota joined Montana and Wyoming in
the spring of 2009 to become the third state
on the network.***