

HEALTH CARE

Telehealth technology helps patients, employers

As employers continue to manage rising health care costs, they are considering more than just the bottom line. Even more important are options that provide improved outcomes and satisfy employees.

One way to help address these issues is through the use of telemedicine technology. According to the American Telemedicine Association, telemedicine is

Just this month, MercyCare opened the first clinic in the state of Iowa — and one of only a few in the nation — that utilizes telemedicine technologies with diagnostics for the delivery of care. The new MercyCare Telehealth Clinic at Rockwell Collins is an employer-based clinic that provides increased access to quality health care for Rockwell Collins employees, who utilize certain health plans, for their most acute needs, at a lower cost than a traditional office visit. The clinic is strategically located on the Rockwell Collins campus for convenient access.

The new clinic is staffed by MercyCare providers and features private, modern exam rooms equipped with telehealth technology, in addition to a lab.

Select MercyCare providers will provide patient care remotely from three credentialed locations in the area, acting in coordination with the patient's primary care

physician, via the telehealth technologies.

Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield worked with Mercy and Rockwell Collins to enable reimbursement for employees utilizing the clinic.

Telemedicine has existed for more than 25 years and includes a wide variety of delivery systems, including telephone visits, video visits, Internet chats and eVisits through applications such as MyChart. At MercyCare Business Health Solutions, we are proud to be on the cutting-edge of the delivery of telemedicine through the use of Cisco telepresence equipment and network technology, and AMD Global Telemedicine software and diagnostic equipment. The diagnostic component is the differentiator.

This form of telemedicine delivery is indeed unique. A secured video feed is part of the visit with the patient, similar to a Skype or Facetime chat, through which the patient can see and speak to their health care provider. The diagnostic technology allows providers at a remote location the ability to hear and see things that would not be possible through a video feed alone. For example, they can listen to heart tones and lung sounds through the use of a USB telephonic stethoscope, or see inside a

DR. TIMOTHY SAGERS
is medical director with
MercyCare Business
Health Solutions.



patient's ears or mouth through the use of a general examination camera.

This capability allows health care providers to identify conditions such as rashes, sinus infections or eye ailments with a digital otoscope. All of these conditions are easily transmitted back through a secured feed to the provider via a special software program.

Telemedicine enables health care systems to deliver care in a way that actually decreases cost. As the technology has matured, telemedicine has become a viable option for even small employers. Providing this increased access to quality health care not only results in improved outcomes and cost effectiveness for both the employee and the employer, it also rates as a high satisfier for patients. It's exciting that this glimpse into the future of care delivery is taking shape right here at home, right now. ●



defined as "the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve a patient's clinical health status."

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Timothy Sagers, MD
Medical Director –
Business Health Solutions

Megan Esch, MA, CRC, CADC
Employee Assistance Program

Molly McWilliam, BS
Certified Wellness Coach

Stephen Runde, MD
Medical Director, MercyCare
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