

Upper Midwest Telehealth Resource Center

Background

Funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, there are currently 12 regional and two national telehealth resource centers across the country. Their overarching mission is to meet the health needs of underserved populations by expanding the availability of telehealth technologies.

Interventions

The Upper Midwest Telehealth Resource Center in Terre Haute, Indiana, focuses on programs and technical needs in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. It provides education, technical assistance and facilitation. The center brings together hospitals, community health clinics and specialists, as well as companies that offer video and audio products and clinical services, such as a portable ophthalmoscope, 24/7 specialist access, and pharmacy access to clinics and rural health providers. The partners share best practices, participate in webinars and have access to other resources. The goal of these centers is to expand telehealth services to underserved populations, particularly those in rural locations.

The perfect storm is brewing in health care, says Becky Sanders, program director. With the shift from fee-for-service to value-based payment models, the public is shouldering more of the cost burden and becoming more tech savvy. In addition, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is adjusting reimbursement with a focus on disease management and preventive services. Sanders says she sees telehealth as a tool that improves overall quality, reduces costs and improves the health of populations—that is, the Triple Aim. “For a long time partner was a solution without a problem,” Sanders says. “Now it’s a key piece in the toolbox needed to move to value-based care.”

Results

Chronic care management will improve the health of patients and lower costs, and applying telehealth technology can make it possible to achieve. For example, Missouri Highlands Health Care, a federally qualified health center, employs 1DocWay, a telepsychiatry company, to offer rural patients access to behavioral health resources.

Lessons Learned

- Physician and/or nurse champion. Identifying a couple of individuals who are very comfortable with technology and serve as provider champions will help change the culture quickly and increase engagement among care providers.
- Interdisciplinary team. Do not ask IT to implement the programs; Sanders recommends they must be designed by the providers who will execute them.

Contact

Becky Sanders
Program Director, Upper Midwest Telehealth Resource Center
Director of Operations, Indiana Rural Health Association
(812) 478-3919, ext. 232
bsanders@indianarha.org