

THE Value Initiative

Members in Action: Redesigning the Delivery System

Spectrum Health – Grand Rapids, MI

Telehealth Program Reduces Costs and Decreases Patient Transfers

The AHA's Members in Action series highlights how hospitals and health systems are implementing new value-based strategies to improve health care affordability. This includes work to redesign the delivery system, manage risk and new payment models, improve quality and outcomes, and implement operational solutions.

Overview

In an effort to reduce patient transfers, increase access to care and reduce costs, Spectrum Health in 2014 created its telehealth program, MedNow, to include a site-to-site specialty telehealth program called Specialty MedNow. Telehealth services have now become a standard of care at Spectrum.

The integrated health care system includes a health plan and medical group. Consults are available via mobile carts in 34 medical specialties and 90 use cases in the emergency department (ED) and inpatient and outpatient settings. Telehealth services are provided among the system's 15 hospitals and 180 ambulatory sites throughout Michigan. The highest volume of services is provided to patients with behavioral health, sleep, wound care and infectious disease conditions.



Spectrum Health's telehealth program saves patients time and money, and results in avoided patient transfers, avoided ED and urgent care center visits, and savings to payers.

Impact

As of November 2018, including Spectrum's direct-to-consumer telehealth program MedNow, there have been 70,600 patient encounters resulting in 323 avoided inpatient transfers, 16,434 avoided ED and urgent care visits, \$5.9 million savings to payers, and 13,772 new primary care patients.

In addition, the availability of care via MedNow saved patients from driving 1.3 million miles.

For sleep consults, Specialty MedNow reduced the consult wait time from 4 ½ months to 2 ½ weeks. This is a result of less physician drive time, more appointment slots and recruiting additional providers enticed by virtual care technology.

The telehealth program also saves patients time and money. Spectrum estimates a typical cancer patient from Marquette, in the Upper Peninsula, spends 14 ½ hours and \$611.80 in non-medical expenses for a routine consult at a hospital in Grand Rapids. The same consult via Specialty MedNow costs the patient 45 minutes and \$14.

For wound patients in its skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and rehab clinics, Spectrum had an initial goal of reducing avoidable inpatient readmissions by 50% through the use of telehealth. In the first year, the reduction was 76%. In addition, Specialty MedNow increased patient satisfaction by reducing transfers from the SNF to the hospital.

Lessons Learned

The Specialty MedNow team recommends starting with realistic goals and scaling up services with the early-adopting providers who embrace the technology.

“We have always loved the philosophy of ‘crawl, walk, run;’” said Joe Brennan, senior director of MedNow. “Starting small and scaling fast has been what we believe is part of the success equation that has gotten us to 70,000 visits.”

He also recommends embedding a telehealth specialist at each care site to identify opportunities for using the technology, building relationships among providers and staff, and serving as a project manager and technical resource.

“It has become the expectation of Spectrum Health patients that, ‘I’m going to have the access and convenience that virtual care offers;’” he said.

Brennan also advises training providers on etiquette during consults, such as wearing a lab coat and badge, having the Spectrum logo in the background and looking into the camera when speaking.

Future Goals

Spectrum Health plans to build competencies and use lessons learned to expand MedNow services out of clinical sites and into patients’ homes.

“Ultimately, the care that doesn’t require a physical exam will be done in the home,” said Brennan.



Spectrum’s Specialty MedNow service allows patients to have virtual consults with specialists from any of the system’s hospitals or clinics.

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