

Telehealth at Jefferson: The Future of Medicine

There is an old saying that “what goes around comes around,” and no statement is truer when it comes to healthcare. Years ago, it was common for physicians to make “house calls” to visit sick patients in their own homes. However, as more patients needed healthcare, it became inefficient for providers to visit so many different homes. Instead, clinicians switched to providing healthcare in a central location, with patients coming to them. With the help of technology, receiving healthcare is now efficient for both the provider and the patient—patients no longer have to trek to the hospital, and clinicians can continue to see patients without leaving their central location.

One new way for patients to see providers is through [JeffConnect](#), a telehealth service launched in June 2015 that offers video visits with a Jefferson healthcare provider via web or mobile application. Currently, Jefferson offers three virtual services through JeffConnect: [On-Demand Virtual Care](#), [Scheduled Online Visits](#), and [Remote Second Opinion](#).

Through On-Demand Virtual Care, Jefferson emergency medicine physicians are available 24/7 to provide care. Because of Jefferson’s geographic location, physicians are licensed to provide care in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Physicians have treated patients as far as north as New Brunswick, New Jersey, and as far south as Smyrna, Delaware. After “seeing” the patient, the telehealth doctor is able to send a summary of the visit to the patient’s primary care doctor, facilitating seamless communication and care coordination. This service was first piloted with Jefferson employees, and opened up to the general public in September 2015.

Scheduled Online Visits allows Jefferson healthcare providers to have follow-up appointments with their patients virtually, as an alternative to having patients come back to the office in person. The providers are each placed in online departments based on their practices and schedule appointments the same way they would for in-person visits. With these services, patients are given more options and additional methods to access the care they need.

Remote Second Opinion consultations are available in certain specialty areas through Thomas Jefferson University Physicians. This includes telephone or video consultations to individuals who are looking to receive a second medical opinion. After reviewing test results and the medical records, the Jefferson specialist is able to provide a recommendation to the individual and their treating physician without the need for them to travel to Philadelphia. The ability to consult a healthcare provider without having to take time off from work, to travel into the city, or to pay for parking, is significant to patients.

Since launching the service, JeffConnect has been a success as evidenced by high patient satisfaction rates of 98% and 92% for On-Demand Virtual Care and Scheduled Online Visits, respectively. As an institution, Jefferson is moving towards a model that incorporates shared decision making between the patient and provider. Instead of having physicians decide where and when patients can get care, patients are able to have more control and get care on their own accord. Many patients are excited about the concept—the average time of a JeffConnect visit is about 10

minutes, and to see a clinician and receive care within the comfort of their own home is a huge benefit. When the occasional technology glitch occurs, Jefferson healthcare providers are able to continue the telehealth visit via phone call and immediately address any health problem that the patient may have.

As JeffConnect services grow and patient satisfaction rises, Jefferson healthcare providers are becoming more engaged with telehealth services. In its first month of operation in June 2015, Jefferson physicians conducted approximately 15 visits. Eleven months later, the number of overall visits increased to approximately 430. As of June 2016, the number of JeffConnect visits is approximately 3000. Jefferson healthcare providers are learning how to conduct telehealth visits and properly exhibit an engaging “webside” manner. For example, clinicians demonstrate creativity in how they conduct a physical exam—by asking the patient to perform certain tasks such as walking around the room or pushing on certain areas of their body. This allows providers to evaluate the patient virtually and engage the patient with questions and education. “It has been both challenging and rewarding to transform a conventional, three dimensional, in-person visit into a virtual encounter with a patient. Involving the patient in the exam has been a requisite part of this process. We have been able to virtually guide a patient through an abdominal exam for example, and gain valuable and relevant clinical information based on their responses,” explains Dr. Roger Band, Vice Chair of Strategic Out-of-Hospital Initiatives.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



The ability to improve access to care may help to prevent patients from waiting until they are so sick that they have no other alternative but to go to the ED. Through Jefferson's telehealth services, patients can seek care earlier, before complications occur and a higher level of care is needed. Telehealth will reduce health costs—by having a \$49 on-demand virtual visit, patients will avoid an expensive trip to the ED, allowing once overcrowded emergency departments to have fewer patients walking through the door.

Of course, not all patient visits are optimal for telehealth services. JeffConnect is best used under certain

circumstances. Patients with routine follow-up appointments for chronic disease management or medication updates are ideal for telehealth. For example, patients with chronic asthma are able to have JeffConnect visits with their pulmonologists to discuss general concerns and symptom management. Pulmonologists are able to observe patients administer a dose of medication using their inhalers and provide guidance on medication effectiveness.

Healthcare is undergoing unprecedented changes and Jefferson is leading the way, focusing on redesigning the way healthcare is delivered. In this

transformation, Jefferson is utilizing telehealth technology as a tool pursuing the three dimensions of the Triple Aim: improving patient access and experience of care, while at the same time lowering healthcare costs, and improving the health of populations. Through our telehealth services, Jefferson is able to provide comprehensive high quality care to patients when and where they need or want it.

Danica Stone

*Telehealth Project Manager
Jefferson University Hospitals
Danica.Stone@jefferson.edu*