

NOPH Leadership Touts Telemedicine Success

Telemedicine, an innovative model that utilizes technology to bring high-quality care to people in need in rural and underserved areas, has been gaining momentum throughout the last decade.

Northwest Ohio Psychiatric Hospital (NOPH) in Toledo recently hopped aboard the technology bandwagon, launching a telemedicine pilot project this past April. The program uses telecommunication and

information technology to help with the linkage of mental health services that patients will need upon discharge.

"By having these video conferences, it helps eliminate distance barriers and the need for community agency partners to come to the hospital for meetings," said NOPH CEO Dr. Mychail Scheramic. "Community mental health center staff can now spend less time in a car driving to meetings and more time providing care to their clients," he added, noting the hospital's telemedicine project helps mental health centers stretch their budgets by reducing travel-related expenses.

Telemedicine has considerable advantages over calling on a phone and putting those attending on speaker phone. Unlike a traditional phone conference, telemedicine provides an opportunity for the community treatment team to see a patient in addition to verbal interaction.

The technologies employed at NOPH are designed with fidelity systems that work to ensure confidentiality and protect the video conference from being seen by others. The transmission of the video and audio is encrypted, and then sent to the other site where it is decrypted. Only the transmission and receiving sites have the "key" to encrypt and decrypt the electronic data.



Dr. Scheramic



Dr. Osinowo

NOPH Chief Clinical Officer Dr. Thomas Osinowo said studies indicate telemedicine is very helpful in:

- Providing access to care and treatment in rural areas.
- Reducing travel times for clinicians and patients.
- Making access to care convenient for patients since, in many cases, patients can be in their home while having contacts with their health care professionals.

So far, the hospital has hosted 24 sessions, providing services to 14 patients. "Patients have been excited to see their community providers and their family members on the video screen while still in a secure environment at NOPH," Dr. Osinowo said.

Of the 23 counties located within the NOPH catchment area, 14 either actively participate, or have indicated an interest in taking advantage of telemedicine services.

Why Telemedicine?

- Patients from far-away counties can interact with their families, forensic monitors and case workers.
- Builds and bridges teams while promoting good service provision through increased accountability.
- Improves/expedites information gathering.
- Facilitates real-time transition and discharge planning.

Challenges:

- Some communities are still struggling to accept TeleHealth.
- Limited IT capabilities among some partners/equipment glitches.
- Change in treatment team schedule to accommodate community agencies can be challenging at times.

Future Opportunities:

- Court appearances.
- Patient consults prior to admission, potentially preventing admissions.