

TeleHealth program ensures timely response, treatment expertise for patients in crisis in remote areas

PROBLEM

Limited access to mental health resources is a crisis in rural areas throughout the United States. Mental health and substance use disorders were the leading cause of “disease burden,” a combination of both mortality and impact on quality of life, in 2015¹. Utah is hit particularly hard. The state ranked last in the nation for adult mental health measures in 2018 and suicide is the leading cause of death for residents ages 10 to 24. Demand for services in the state will only increase due to Medicaid expansion and population growth^{1,2}. These challenges are complex, requiring coordination between payers, providers, and community services.

SOLUTION

The Intermountain Healthcare TeleHealth Crisis Care Program is part of the comprehensive behavioral health services program to address these mental health deserts. Licensed clinicians with extensive crisis care experience and provide 24/7 coverage to emergency rooms and hospitals throughout the Intermountain West. Working together with local professionals, the program provides timely access to mental health assessments, safety plans and admission to a behavioral health facility when necessary.

RESULTS

Since the program was launched in 2014, Intermountain’s TeleHealth Crisis Care Program has:

- Conducted more than 13,500 evaluations (as of December 2020) using telehealth technologies
- Achieved a 15-minute response time in 85% of requested consults
- Crisis evaluation times are comparable to in-person consults
- Approximately 60% of patients are triaged to an appropriate behavioral health facility.
- Provided the expertise and experience of highly qualified mental health professionals familiar with Intermountain West behavioral health resources
- Reduced burden on local staff by managing emergency room patients through disposition

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

In rural communities, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find and hire qualified mental health providers. TeleHealth Crisis Care is an effective way to provide specialized services without hiring full time mental health clinicians. Partnering with Intermountain Healthcare may also enhance a facility's reputation for providing an improved behavioral health services.

PATIENT AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

A telehealth approach to care ensures cost savings to patients, their families, and health care facilities, while improving quality of care. The program reduces stress and burden to patients and clinical staff by having a qualified crisis worker immediately be able to interact with the patient.

WORKING IN COLLABORATION WITH THE LOCAL TEAM TO KEEP PATIENTS CLOSER TO HOME

Intermountain Healthcare telehealth-enabled care ensures collaborative coverage with onsite local health clinicians around the clock, including after-hours and weekend coverage. With access to clinical guidelines and protocols, as well as focus on zero patient harm initiatives, Intermountain's licensed mental health clinicians strive for collaborative, cooperative, and open communication to build trusting relationships.

ABOUT INTERMOUNTAIN HEALTHCARE

Intermountain Healthcare is a not-for-profit system of 25 hospitals, 225 clinics, a Medical Group with 2,800 employed physicians and advanced practice clinicians, a health insurance company called SelectHealth, and other health services throughout the Intermountain West. Intermountain is widely recognized as a leader in transforming healthcare using evidence-based best practices to consistently deliver high-quality outcomes and sustainable costs. For more information, see intermountainhealthcare.org. Intermountain TeleHealth Services has been working with multiple clinical groups since 2014 and currently collaborates with over 35 clinical services to improve care, reduce costs and improve clinical outcomes throughout eight states in the Intermountain West and Alaska.

References

1. Kamal, R., et al., Costs and Outcomes of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders in the US. JAMA, 2017. 318(5): p. 415-415.
2. Summers, L., Meppen, D., Ball, S., , Utah's Mental Health System. 2019, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.

