

TeleHealth Medical Oncology Program

Problem

Cancer is one of the top five leading risks of death for rural residents,¹ who make up about 20% of the nation's population.² But with oncologists concentrated in urban areas, there is often a large geographical gap between cancer patients and specialists.³ As a result, getting cancer treatment is often time-consuming, emotionally and financially burdensome to patients and their loved ones, and it also takes caregiving out of local communities.

Solution

Intermountain Health affirmed its commitment to supporting rural communities and expanding access by opening the first Telehealth Medical Oncology clinic in central Utah in 2015. Today we support over a dozen locations across the Intermountain West and provide care to nearly 450 patients annually. Through our comprehensive team approach, advanced technology, and individualized cancer care, we are committed to helping our patients get well, live well, and stay well. Intermountain's TeleOncology program brings safe, effective cancer care treatment to smaller communities, ensuring patients receive the same high-quality care as urban clinics while reducing the travel burden for patients and caregivers.

Results

Intermountain Health conducted a study in 2020,⁴ looking at the first 4 years of the Telehealth Medical Oncology Program at one central Utah facility. At the time, the study found that the program:

- Provided care to 119 patients with over 1,000 scheduled visits, offering the same high-quality care that they would have received in person in a large, urban setting.
- Saved the average patient almost \$3,000 in time and travel costs and offset the CO2 equivalent per patient of carbon sequestered by 1 acre of forest in a year.
- Pharmacy, infusion, radiology, and lab services contributed new revenue of approximately \$3.6 million between 2015 and 2018.

TeleHealth Medical Oncology Clinical Benefits

Local primary care providers can often continue providing high-quality, patient-centered care without patients transferring to specialists in urban areas. The delivery of healthcare locally benefits patients, providers, and healthcare facilities in rural communities.⁵ Additionally, an unanticipated benefit is raising overall cancer awareness and improvements in cancer treatment.⁶ Using telehealth technologies,⁷ oncologist-led cancer care teams are available for:

- Initial consults and all follow-up visits
- Visit scheduling and pre-authorization coordination
- Pre-treatment visits and patient education
- Supportive care visits
- Chemotherapy, including pharmaceutical compounding and delivery
- Survivorship care
- 340B coordination and consultation

TeleHealth Medical Oncology Economic Benefits

Local facilities retain revenue by providing essential services such as labs, radiology, infusion services, and medications. Depending on patient condition and hospital resources, pathology and procedures may also be completed by local physicians. Available federal initiatives such as the 340B drug discount program ensure that communities can continue to support low-income, uninsured, and underinsured people living in rural America.⁸ In qualifying communities, a facility fee determined by the originating site may be charged for telehealth services.⁹

TeleHealth Medical Oncology Patient & Community Benefits

Patients save time and money when treatment is available close to home. The TeleHealth Medical Oncology program helps to reduce financial and physical burdens associated with extended travel to allow patients, families, and loved ones to focus on personal wellness while living with cancer. Our communities also benefit from a reduction in carbon emissions from reduced travel for medical treatment.

Working in Collaboration with the Local Team to Keep Patients Closer to Home

Sustainable telehealth oncology programs require coordination and commitment from onsite administrators and the local clinical team. Intermountain oncology caregivers partner with the local healthcare provider group -- primary care, emergency, pharmacy, and nursing staff -- to deliver guideline-concordant cancer care whether the patient is seen in person or via telehealth technologies. While rarely used, coordinated emergency services are essential for these programs to provide care for an unanticipated reaction to cancer treatments. The team also corroborates with our partners to preserve and promote existing relationships among primary care providers and patients.

Partnering with Intermountain TeleHealth

Intermountain TeleHealth provides patients, no matter where they are located, with high-quality specialty care from Intermountain's world-class clinical experts. We strive to enable our partners to improve the patient experience, increase access, lower costs, and keep revenues in local community facilities whenever possible. Partnering with Intermountain Health showcases your commitment to your providers, patients, and community.

About Intermountain Health

Intermountain Health is a team of nearly 60,000 caregivers who serve the healthcare needs of people across the Intermountain West, primarily in Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, and Kansas. We are an integrated, non-profit health system based in Salt Lake City, with clinics, a medical group, affiliate networks, hospitals, homecare, telehealth, health insurance plans, and other services, along with wholly owned subsidiaries including SelectHealth, Saltzer Health, Castell, Tellica, and Classic Air Medical.



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