

TeleHealth Skilled Nursing Facility Hospitalist Program

Problem

Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs) are looking for ways to prevent an acute care readmission, which can have negative consequences for both patients and facilities. Readmissions are disruptive for patients and their families, and can result in penalties for SNFs that are participating in value-based purchasing and are a quality metric influencing reimbursement. But despite the desire to keep and treat patients within the SNF, low Registered Nurse (RN) to patient ratios and limited after-hours physician coverage frequently require SNF residents to be transferred to emergency departments for evaluation and treatment.

Solution

The Intermountain Health TeleHealth Skilled Nursing Facility Hospitalist Program partners with SNFs to support local care teams in providing safe and effective post-acute and long-term care for their patients. Program hospitalists ensure patients make safe transitions into a skilled nursing facility and then provide evaluation and treatment to prevent readmission back to an acute care facility during their stay.

Results

Since the program study began in 2019, Intermountain hospitalists have conducted more than 500 telehealth interactions with SNF staff and provided medical evaluation and treatment to residents more than 250 times, resulting in a reduced number of readmissions.

Examples of hospitalist interventions include:

- Medication orders, adjustments, and clarification to prevent errors.
- Therapeutic patient and family visits for agitated or deteriorating patients.
- Ensuring continuity of care between settings by bridging documentation gaps between acute and post-acute EHR systems.
- Educating staff to recognize and mitigate potential readmissions or clinical decompensation.
- Reducing readmission rates at each of our study facilities.
- Year over year reduction in 30-day CMS readmissions:

30-day CMS Readmissions	Q4 2018 (<i>pre-telehealth</i>)	Q4 2019 (<i>post telehealth</i>)
Site A	16.39%	12.56%
Site B	12.85%	6.89%

Background: TeleHealth in Skilled Nursing Care

Patients with complex medical conditions are increasingly being discharged from hospitals to post-acute and long-term care settings¹. Roughly 20% of these individuals are readmitted to acute care facilities within a month, posing elevated risks for both 30- and 100-day mortality²⁻⁴. The causes for these readmissions are multifaceted but predominantly affect older patients with multiple comorbidities and diminished functional status. Research indicates that effective management of injuries, infections, and complex health conditions is crucial for reducing the need for acute care²⁻⁵. For residents in skilled nursing facilities, immediate access to medical care is essential for managing conditions like sepsis and other underlying health issues^{2-4,6}. One of the primary advantages of implementing a telemedicine program in SNFs is the potential for reducing these readmissions to acute care settings^{7,8}.

A Collaborative Approach Between Local and Remote Teams

Intermountain collaborates with onsite medical and clinical care teams to manage care for residents in SNFs. Hospitalists meet daily with the multi-disciplinary team to review new admissions and high-risk patients. After the daily meeting, the hospitalist visits with high-risk patients via telehealth technology for evaluation and treatment recommendations. An onsite RN participates in the rounding and transcribes medical orders into the patient chart to begin implementing medical treatments.

Telehealth visits for residents in skilled nursing care include:

- Initial consultations
- Transition care follow-up and treatment
- Acute events and injuries
- Appropriate admission to an acute care facility
- Coordination with specialists such as Wound Care, Infectious Diseases and Behavioral Health

Positive Impacts for Residents, Providers, and Skilled Nursing Facilities

Since July 2019, this program has demonstrated the success of having hospitalists engage with residents and clinical staff in skilled nursing facilities. Preliminary results have shown a reduction in acute care readmissions, avoidance of medication errors, and increased satisfaction among SNF staff who are confident they can consult with a physician 24/7 with concerns about their patients.

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.

References

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