

Working Effectively With the Criminal Justice System

Telehealth Technology Streamlines Communications for Mentally Ill Patient Case

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Healthcare is complex, and in a state like South Dakota where cities and services are separated by hundreds of miles of open space, it can make sorting out the medical and psychological details of a criminal justice case time-consuming and difficult. For one family, this challenging process was simplified through telehealth technology.

“We had an outpatient referral from an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) several months ago,” explained Randy Allen, counselor at Behavior Management Systems, which serves the mental health needs of more than 11,000 people in a 20,000-square-mile area in South Dakota. BMS has worked with the Great Plains Telehealth Resource & Assistance Center (gpTRAC). “This man had recently relocated out of town and was living halfway across the state.”

The patient had developed a rare medical condition, and his doctors were using various infusions of medications and steroids to treat the condition.

“The medications were messing up his sleep, and he was becoming psychotic and more paranoid with each passing day,” Allen said. “In one instance, he got into a physical altercation with his wife, which resulted in his arrest. It was clear to us that the situation occurred as a result of problems with his medication. Both the individual and his wife didn’t want him in jail, and because this all happened during COVID, the jail didn’t want him in jail because he was high risk.”

Telemedicine technology as well as video conferencing played a big role in how the entire situation was handled.

“First, we were able to help this patient with anger management through telehealth visits,” Allen said. “Then, we along with his medical doctors were able to video conference with the court system to explain the issue with his MS medications. The physician was actively working

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to adjust his medications so they wouldn't negatively affect his behavior and in regular communication with the couple to get their feedback. We were able to keep him out of jail."

After being able to sort out the initial situation through telehealth visits and video conferencing, the individual began regular medical check-ins to ensure the situation remained stable.

"This person wanted to ride his motorcycle to visit family out of state," Allen said. "Telehealth allowed him to simply pull off at a rest stop in Minnesota during his trip to check in with us through a telehealth appointment. The technology gives us the flexibility to connect in new ways. I'm sure this situation was resolved more quickly and efficiently than if we had to manage it in more conventional ways."

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