

Personal Tech Help...at Your Service

Virtual Care Support Team Helps Patients Establish Telehealth Connections

Author: Pam Malinoski

If you're not a "computer person," you know how overwhelming today's technology can be. The capabilities and connections can be staggering. Combine the feeling of technological illiteracy with a global pandemic and an acute health care issue, and you quickly create a recipe for worry, at best, and panic, at worst.

When Gundersen Health System in Wisconsin launched its telehealth initiative at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization found that many of its patients needed help getting their computers, devices or phones set up to participate in a virtual appointment.



Photo description: Gundersen Health System

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Creating a New Team

“Our hospital’s information systems (IS) staff was really not equipped to deal with the tech issues of our patients; their customers are our clinicians and employees,” said Jessica Easterday, program manager of telemedicine at Gundersen. Easterday is a member of the Program Advisory Council (PAC) of the Great Plains Telehealth Resource & Assistance Center (gpTRAC). “Instead, we quickly created a virtual care support team that worked with our IT department but served as a personalized tech support service for our patients.”

During the early days of the pandemic, Gundersen was promoting its telehealth option. “When patients called for an appointment, we’d offer a telehealth visit,” Easterday said. “If patients said they didn’t know how to manage the technology, we’d either transfer them to our virtual care support team or help them set up an appointment with the team at a later time.”

Initially, Gundersen had six individuals who were either brought back from furlough or were on reduced hours to staff the virtual care support team. “We selected customer-service focused employees who had access to our electronic medical records and had a talent for being patient with our patients.”



Photo description: Gundersen Health System’s Virtual Care Support team

Step-by-Step Guidance

The virtual care support team would walk patients through everything from downloading the app, setting up mics and cameras, and connecting to a practice appointment. Once their actual telehealth appointment rolled around, patients would be confident and ready.

“The support calls probably averaged around 15 to 20 minutes a piece,” Easterday said. “However, if they had someone who was extremely technologically challenged, it could take an hour.”

Within a month of setting up telehealth services, Gundersen had its virtual care support team up and running. The team handled between 60 to 80 calls a day and has recently scaled back to four team members.

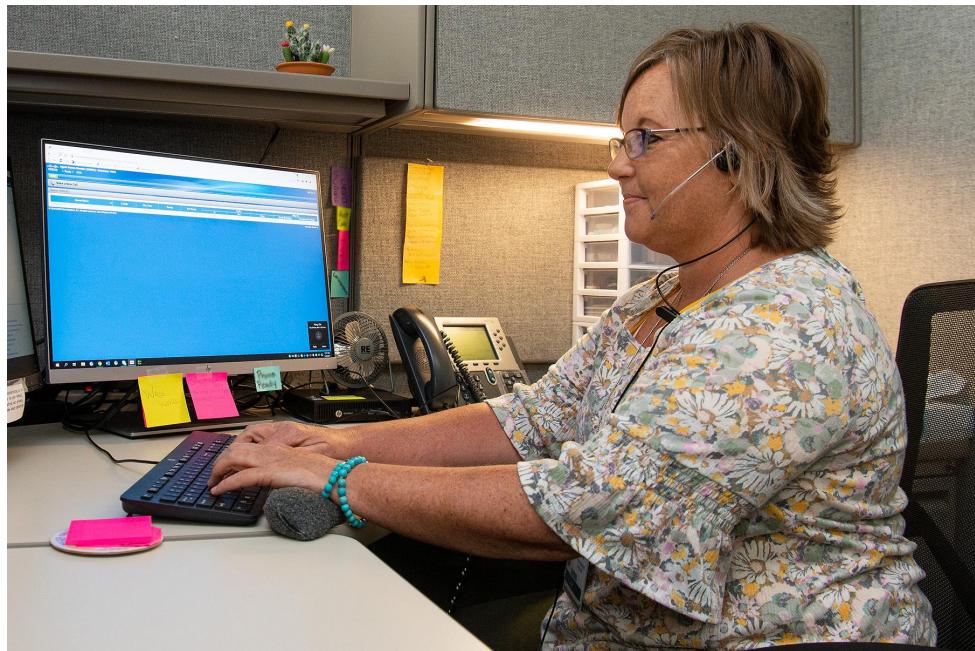


Photo description: A member of Gundersen Health System’s Virtual Care Support team

Synergy With IS Help Desk

Gundersen’s IS help desk served as a backup and support for the virtual care support team throughout the process. “They were great in creating guides to help our virtual care support team get through the process and give them confidence,” Easterday said. “They designed a step-by-step, screen-shot based guide for pretty much every device our patients could have at home.”

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For example, if a patient was using Google Chromebook, the virtual care support team member could walk them through every screen and prompt, explaining exactly where buttons were located and what to do to get up and running.

"We've also identified particular trends and troubleshooting guides," Easterday said. "If a patient uses a particular email system, we know that messages end up in the spam folder or certain apps generally block certain links. We've developed an excellent camaraderie between our virtual care support team and our IS department. They help each other through the process."

By working together, Gundersen Health System's team has found ways to bring telehealth services to its patients in a welcomed and easily digestible way during a time of a global health crisis.

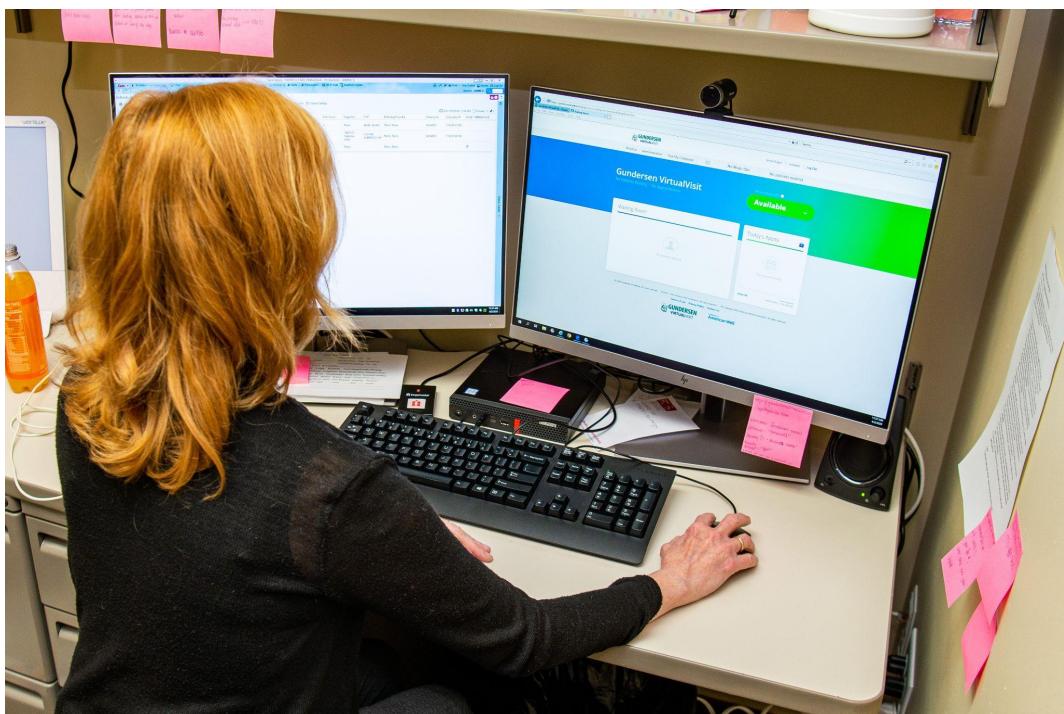


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