Veterans Health Administration Telehealth Services

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Telehealth
VISN 12 Telehealth

DOD Defense Health Board Meeting
August 10th, 2022 – Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, North Chicago, IL
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• I have no relevant financial or non-financial relationships in the products or services communicated, compared, or evaluated in this presentation.

• The names of actual companies and products mentioned here may be the trademark(s) of their respective owners.

• The terms ‘Telehealth’ and ‘Telemedicine’ might be used interchangeably throughout this presentation
Agenda

1. A Brief History of Telehealth
2. Our Program and Approach
3. Our Scope and Data
4. Our Vision and Goals
5. Future Directions
1. A Brief History of Telehealth
So, What is TeleHealth?

• TeleHealth is a transfer of medical information via telecommunication technologies for consulting, remote procedures or exams.

• TeleHealth is NOT a separate subspecialty.
  • Performing same procedures over distance and sometimes time, using technology.

Credit: blog.dingtone.me
History of TeleHealth

• Who was the first?

• That’s a matter of opinion.

• Civil War Era – 1865
  • Telegraph wire between hot air balloons relayed information from the battle front to the surgeons in the rear.

Credit: Dr. Elizabeth Krupinski, University of Arizona
History of TeleHealth

• 1906 – United States
  • First EEG information was transmitted via telegraph

• 1925 – Radio Doctor Predicted

Credit: Dr. Elizabeth Krupinski, University of Arizona
History of TeleHealth

1959 University of Nebraska Medical Center:

- Two-Way Television
- Mostly Psychiatry Group Therapy
  - Omaha VA
  - Lincoln VA
  - Grand Island VA Hospital

Image from Wittson, Cecil L.; Affleck, D. Craig; Johnson, Van Mental Hospitals, Vol 12(10), 1961, 22-23.
History of TeleHealth

• Dr. Kenneth Bird – Boston, MA 1963-1970
• Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) to Logan Airport
Of Note: MGH established a telepsychiatry link to Bedford, MA VA Hospital in 1968 which was operational until mid-1980’s.
History of TeleHealth

• Limitations of Dr. Bird’s Program

  • Technology
    ▪ Used Microwave/Satellite Transmissions
    ▪ World Wide Web still in its infancy

  • Expensive
    ▪ TV equipment was not cheap at that time
History of TeleHealth

• Why was Dr. Bird’s Program Important?

  • Inspired Other Programs
    ▪ NASA
      ▪ Blueprint for how to provide healthcare to astronauts in space (Like Captain Lovell)

  • Showed that this type of healthcare modality was truly feasible

  • Not much was done with TeleHealth outside of NASA until the 1990s
    ▪ Arizona was the first state to fund state-wide telehealth in 1992

• VA officially implemented telehealth in 2003
So Why TeleHealth in the VA?
Our Veteran Population

- Approximately 19 million Veterans in the United States FY21
- >9.2 million Veterans registered with VA FY21

Source: VSSC
Our Veteran Population At a Glance

- 32% of registered Veterans and 43% of ALL Veterans live in rural or highly rural areas (VSSC, FY22)
  - Limited Access to VA Care
  - Can live hours away from nearest facility
  - Outpatient clinics do not have all specialty care services

- Urban Veterans also need access to safe, high-quality health care.
  - Clinic wait times
  - Driving/Parking/Traffic
  - Time off from work, etc.

VA Veteran Population by Rurality FY22-May 22 (VSSC 2022)
- 311,155 Highly Rural
- 2,603,209 Rural
- 6,011,318 Urban
The Why

Trusted Care: Anytime, Anywhere

- VA will leverage telehealth technologies to enhance the accessibility, capacity, quality, and experience of VA care for Veterans, their families, and their caregivers anywhere in the country.

- VA will match and optimize clinical supply and demand across the country to address health care disparities.
2. Our Program and Approach
Telehealth Modalities

Clinical Video Telehealth

Store and Forward Telehealth

Remote Patient Monitoring Home Telehealth
Clinical Video TeleHealth (CVT)

- Real-Time, Synchronous Video and Audio Transmission.
  - Leverages telepresenters and exam peripherals
  - Multidisciplinary team model
  - In-person and video
  - Example: TelePrimary Care
Store and Forward
TeleHealth (SFT)

- Asynchronous Modality

- Storing clinical information (data, images, sound, video, etc.) and then forwarding to or retrieved by another clinical site for evaluation.

- TeleDermatology
- TeleRetinal Imaging (TRI)
- TeleRadiology
- TeleSleep Medicine
- TeleWound Care
Remote Patient Monitoring - Home TeleHealth (RPM-HT)

- Using in-home devices and technologies to monitor symptoms/vitals.
- Monitored by Care Coordinators
- Use of approved Disease Management Protocols (DMPs)
  - Helps with chronic conditions
  - Encourages patient independence
VA VIDEO CONNECT

- Video Conferencing Tool
  - Web based
- Secure & Simple
- Connects Provider & Veteran
  - Any device
  - Any location
HOW DOES IT WORK?

1. Schedule
   VA Video Connect Visit

2. Open
   Email & Click on link.

3. Join
   Virtual Medical Room
Inside the Virtual Medical Room:
Services Offered

TeleAnesthesia
TeleAudiology
TeleCardiology
TeleChaplain
TeleCompensation & Pension
TeleCritical Care
TeleDentistry
TeleDermatology
TeleEye Care

TeleGenomics
TeleGI Hepatology
TeleHematology
TeleInfectious Disease
TeleMental Health
TeleMOVE!
TeleNephrology
TeleNeurology
TeleNutrition

TelePathology
TelePharmacy
TelePodiatry
TelePrimary Care
TelePulmonology
TeleRehabilitation
TeleRetinal Imaging
TeleRheumatology

TeleSCI/D

TeleSleep
TeleSpirometry
TeleStroke
TeleSurgery
TeleTransplant
TeleWholeHealth
TeleWound Care
Womens Health
Approach

Where VA Telehealth Occurs

**Home/Community**
- Home Telehealth / Remote Monitoring
- VA Video Connect/Care Connect
- Store and Forward in the Home
- ATLAS

**Clinic**
- Video Telehealth
  - Primary Care
  - Mental Health
  - 50+ specialties
  - Store and Forward Telehealth
  - Provider Connect

**Hospital**
- TeleCritical Care
- TeleStroke
- Tele-Nephrology
- More...

How VA Implements Telehealth

**Local**
- Connected Care Integration into all routine operations

**Regional**
- Sharing/Distributing high volume services across VA networks

**National**
- Delivering access to rare, specialized expertise at any location.
VA Telehealth: Why It Matters

• **Accessibility** – Bringing care to Veterans.

• **Capacity** – Matching clinical supply and demand.

• **Quality** – Providing the right care at the right time.

• **Veteran and Provider Experience** – Fitting in with Veterans’ lives and meeting their needs.
3. Our Scope and Data
Overall FY21 Data

- VHA is the largest telehealth provider in the United States
- >11.2 million episodes of care
- >9.5 million video visits to home
- >2.3 million Veterans served
- >67,000 digital divide consultations
- >104,000 Veterans with iPads

Source: VSSC
Year Over Year Growth

Video and Store and Forward Telehealth Encounters

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Source: VSSC
“The VA telehealth program really saved my life when I had COVID-19, because every single day, I had someone who was checking on me at home. My telehealth nurse checked on my symptoms and encouraged me through my feelings of helplessness and depressive episodes.”

Source: VSSC
Our Experience (Video to Home)

Source: VSSC
Veteran Experience

Veteran Preference for Care When Surveyed Following Video Telehealth Visits in their Home (FY22-Q3)

Source: VSSC
Veteran Experience Across Video-to-Home

Veteran Experience Domain Scores following Video Telehealth Visits in Their Homes (FY22-Q3)

Source: VSSC
4. Our Vision and Goals
Our Vision

Trusted Care: Anytime, Anywhere

VA will use connected technologies to enhance the accessibility, capacity, quality, and experience of VA care for Veterans, their families, and their caregivers anywhere in the country.

Connected Care will be integrated into the daily lives of both VA staff members and the Veterans they serve.
Five Year Strategic Plan

Strategic Vision: 2021 – 2025

Trusted Care: Anytime, Anywhere
VHA CONNECTED CARE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025
Trusted Care: Anytime, Anywhere

GOAL 1: Enhance Veteran Digital Engagement

GOAL 2: Deliver Health Care Without Walls

GOAL 3: Solidify Connected Care Foundations
Enhance Veteran Digital Engagement
Strategy 1 | Build an Engaging Digital Front Door
Strategy 2 | Support Veterans in Managing Their Own Health

Deliver Health Care Without Walls
Strategy 1 | Deliver Care in the Home
Strategy 2 | Expand Clinical Capacity
Strategy 3 | Empower VA’s Workforce to Deliver Virtual Care

Solidify Connected Care Foundations
Strategy 1 | Modernize VA’s Connected Care Infrastructure
Strategy 2 | Analyze Digital Health Data and Connected Care Program for New Insights
Strategy 3 | Enhance Connected Care Operations and Authorities
Telehealth Clinical Resource Sharing

VA will establish and leverage VISN level Clinical Resource Hubs and Virtual Medical Centers to match and optimize clinical supply and demand of high-volume services across VA facilities to enhance the capacity, equity, and accessibility of VA clinical services.
Set Accessible Targets, Tracked Progress, and Celebrated Success

VA Video Connect Capable Health Care Professionals

Source: VSSC
“§ 1730C. Licensure of health care professionals providing treatment via telemedicine

“(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any provision of law regarding the licensure of health care professionals, a covered health care professional may practice the health care profession of the health care professional at any location in any State, regardless of where the covered health care professional or the patient is located, if the covered health care professional is using telemedicine to provide treatment to an individual under this chapter.
Broke Down the Barriers for Patients

Zero Rating VA Video Connect
- T-Mobile, Verizon, AT&T, SafeLink by TracFone

Digital Divide Consultation
- Loaned 4G iPads
- Assistance with Federal Subsidies
- Technology discounts

Expanded Patient Technology Support
- National Telehealth Technology Help Desk
- VA Video Connect Test Call Services
- “White-Glove” tablet support

Fifteen percent of Veteran households do not have an internet connection.

*Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 2019*
Integrated VVC in Existing Workflows

Scheduling System Integration

Return to Clinic Order for Health Care Professionals

• Return to Clinic Orders will include a check box option allowing health care professionals to annotate future appointment requests with the statement “VVC Appropriate/Offer Option.”

• This check box is relevant when health care professionals are ordering an in-person or telephone follow-up visit but have determined the visit could be completed using VA Video Connect (VVC) if the Veteran prefers.
Worked to Make it Easy

VA Loaner Device App

VA will enhance Veteran and healthcare professional experience by establishing tools and processes so that loaned tablets are scheduled through standard scheduling processes, dynamic links are used in place of static links, and Veterans can easily find and enter their appointments.
Measured and Course Corrected

Stakeholder Experience Surveys
- VA will maintain Veteran and health care professional experience surveys and integrate their results in management processes to identify and address improvement opportunities.

Quality Scorecard
VA will integrate a connected care quality scorecard, metrics, targets, and protocols into quality management processes to identify and address improvement opportunities.
Got Started

Telehealth Growth / Evolution

- 2003: Home Telehealth
- 2007: Clinic Based Telehealth
- 2011: Inpatient Telehealth
- 2017: Telehealth Hubs
- 2019: Anywhere to Anywhere
- 2020: Connected Care Expansion & Integration into all clinical operations

COVID-19
5. Future Directions
Deciding Where To Go Next – My VA TeleHealth Experience

• Create an environment and culture of innovation
• Monitor emerging technologies
• Identify gaps in care or areas that can be improved upon
• Give staff the tools and support and let them create
• Disseminate best practices, provide training and standardization, solicit feedback
Creating a Foundation for Innovation and Help People Dream

ATLAS (Accessing Telehealth Through Local Area Stations)

• Aims to enhance the accessibility of VA care for Veterans in their communities and helps bridge the digital divide.
• Offers an alternative experience to telehealth at home or routine care at the local VA facility, by providing a private space, free of distractions, that is also comfortable and affords a living room like setting to receive care.
• Initiative included:
  - System to schedule telehealth visits in private spaces
  - Infection control protocols
  - Training and guidance
  - Communication plans and toolkits
  - Tools for evaluating the community surrounding a potential telehealth access station
Connected Care Programs

VA Telehealth

- Asynchronous Store and Forward Telehealth
- ATLAS (Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations)
- Clinical Resource Hubs
- Hospital telemedicine
- Remote Patient Monitoring – Home Telehealth
- Synchronous Telehealth
- VA Video Connect

VA Telehealth Services website: telehealth.va.gov

My HealtheVet

- Appointments
- Blue Button (download my Health Records)
- Secure Messaging
- Veterans’ Health Library

My HealtheVet web portal: myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home

VA Mobile

- Apps for Health Care Professionals
- Apps for Veterans
- Examples:
  - Annie apps
  - MOVE! Coach
  - VA Online Scheduling

VA Mobile website: mobile.va.gov
Summary: Our Role

• Establishing the vision, strategy, tactics
• Setting accessible targets and measures
• Overcoming barriers for staff and patients
• Making it easy
• Obtaining the data, tracking, and course correcting
• Giving people permission to get started
• Creating a foundation for further innovation
• Letting people dream
Questions?

Walter W. Worthington, Sr (1929-2015)
US Army, 2nd Armored Division
Resources

- VHA Telehealth Services (va.gov)
- VA.gov Home | Veterans Affairs
- VA Office of Connected Care

- Contact: darrin.worthington@va.gov