

Telehealth Continues to Grow at SFMH

A more complete range of health care services has been made available at SFMH through our linkages with the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN).

“This service has grown a tremendous amount in the past several years,” comments SFMH Director of Patient Care Services, Joan Kuiack. “New funding from the Champlain LHIN has allowed us to grow and expand an already busy service with the focus of providing care closer to home to a significant number of patients,” adds Kuiack. “This newest expansion has enabled SFMH to employ a part-time RPN Telemedicine Provider to provide additional support for the approximately 1500 patients seen on an annual basis.”

The OTN enables more timely access to care and reduces the physical distance needed to travel for that care using state-of-the-art video conferencing technologies over a secure network. SFMH relies on the service for patient consultations with specialists located at other hospitals throughout Ontario, both for initial consults and for follow-up consultations. OTN also offers many educational events, which are available to staff and physicians.

“In some cases we’ve been able to decrease wait times for our patients to see the specialists,” says Faye Yantha, RPN Telemedicine Provider in the OTN program at SFMH.

“Some of the visiting consultants note that the time spent traveling to an in-person clinic can be better spent seeing patients, and OTN provides them with the means to do just that,” explains SFMH Telemedicine Coordinator, Susan Coulas. She notes as an example that Dr. Nicole Delbrouck is able to see her dialysis patients located in Barry’s Bay, Deep River, Pembroke

and Arnprior in a more timely manner, and also Dr. Susan Krajewski can consult with surgical patients from our area with improved efficiency and reduced commuting hours using the OTN technology.

Many people are already accustomed to talking online using services like Skype in their personal lives, and once the patient and the consultant start communicating and patients can see for themselves there is little to no noticeable lag, they realize it’s no different than meeting in person.

Benefits for local patients include less financial strain incurred by transportation costs, high parking fees in larger centres, and less stress having to navigate around an unfamiliar hospital, adds Coulas.

“Since the allocation of Renfrew County’s enhanced funding for the Telemedicine Nursing Initiative in April 2012, significant growth and expansion has been recognized in all the identified priority areas: mental health, pre-diabetes and diabetes, complex health conditions and pre-/post-op care,” explains Karen Roosen, Chair of Renfrew County Subregional Telemedicine Network.

“SFMH continues to work collaboratively with our Renfrew County Subregional Telemedicine Network to grow and expand telemedicine services in pre-ops, mental health, surgical consults, cardiac and diabetes care, and to continue to work with and support the consultant sites as Telemedicine grows to become a part of their service delivery” adds Coulas. “We recognize that OTN cannot be used for every consult, but we also recognize that there are many consultant appointments where OTN can play a role, and this is where the focus of our collabo-

ration and networking lies.”

Much of the success of the program is related to the enthusiasm of Coulas and Yantha, notes Kuiack. Coulas says that the Telemedicine Program at SFMH provides both RN and RPN nursing support for the clinics based upon consultant requirements, and has the capability to use special camera equipment and electronic stethoscope connection to the monitoring system on one of four platforms located throughout the hospital to ensure the most complete visit possible.

Finally, Coulas does provide credit to the patients of our area for advocating for the use of OTN when visiting their consultants. “We have had enough successful connections to say that patients can make a difference in how their health care is provided.”



Faye Yantha, RPN Telemedicine Provider, assists William Dombroskie during his Telehealth visit with orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Ritter. Mr. Dombroskie sits in front of the video screen at St. Francis while Dr. Ritter sits in front of his screen in Ottawa.