



Advancing Rural Health Care One Patient at a Time

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I-70 Community Hospital Advances Rural Health Care with Telemedicine Services

KC Specialists Ramp-up to Keep Pace with the Rural Hospital

Telemedicine is not futuristic, far-fetched or out of reach—at least not for I-70 Community Hospital. For some time now, the 15-bed, critical access hospital has enabled patients to receive follow-up care with out-of-town physicians at their Sweet Springs and Concordia facilities.

“To look at our facility you would never imagine that we have one of the most robust telemedicine units available in the state of Missouri,” James Noble said, director of lab, marketing and technology at the Hospital. “We are currently working with specialists in Kansas City who are going into high gear to install telemedicine capability just so they can work with the equipment that currently exists at our small, rural hospital.”

“Telemedicine is ideal for rural communities like Sweet Springs,” said Julie Davenport, the Hospital’s CEO. “It’s especially ideal for elderly patients who no longer have a comfort level with driving into the city. This technology allows patients to forego long drive-times, traffic congestion and long stints in the waiting room. Instead, they drive to the Hospital and visit with a specialist remotely—in some instances they are back home in as little as 30 minutes.”

How it works:

Telemedicine allows patients to visit specialists and other health care providers via a video interface or television screen. For instance, if a patient sees a physician for a sore throat and is referred to an ENT (ear nose and throat) specialist, the visit with the specialist can take place close to the patient’s home at the physician’s office or at a nearby hospital.

"Health IT and telemedicine may seem a bit foreign to some, but these advances in health care deliver quality patient outcomes," Davenport said. "Things like electronic prescriptions, digital radiology services, and electronic health records reduce medical errors, health care cost—not to mention time. Quite frankly, if you can add both comfort and convenience to a doctor's visit, it's a win for the patient and the physician."

In general terms, a telemedicine visit with a specialist could look a bit like this:

- The specialist gets the patient's medical history directly by listening to the patient and attending health care provider instead of from dictated notes.
- Medical devices may check the patient's vitals and in the case of the ENT referral, are used by the provider to glean high-definition video of the throat and vocal cords. The remote specialist may ask the patient to cough, pronounce letters, etc., to examine the patient more thoroughly. The remote specialist is able to view the video in real time and use this data for immediate diagnosis and treatment.
- Follow-up visits and consultations with the specialist are treated in the same manner.

"Telemedicine is all about peace of mind," Noble said. "Peace of mind for the retired couple on a fixed-income in knowing that they no longer have to drive into the city and spend the entire day on a follow-up visit that they know will only take 15 minutes. They simply drive over to our Hospital or our nearest clinic, talk with the specialist face-to-face and are back home quicker than the time it takes to shop for groceries."

"It also offers peace of mind for the nurse working short staffed at a rural nursing home knowing that any time she feels the need day or night, she can speak with an experienced ER Physician face to face about a particular patient's needs or symptoms. It's peace of mind for our staff in knowing that no matter what situation comes through the Hospital doors, we can be speaking with a world class specialist within mere minutes."

About I-70 Community Hospital

I-70 Community Hospital is a full-service medical facility with family clinics in Sweet Springs, Concordia and another to open in Alma, MO on April 1, 2011. All clinics are telemedicine equipped. The facility offers a variety of out-patient services as well as specialty clinics and an extended stay (swing bed) program for recovering patients. To learn more, call 660.335.7417 or visit, I70MedCenter.com.

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