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(S.D.)-Black Hills Health Care System Offers Modern Care For Vets

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 12/17/2012 10:08 AM

Photo: Returning veterans take advantage of high-tech medical care through VA Black Hills Health Care System (BHHCS).

(BLACK HILLS)-Veterans can now utilize new technology for their follow-up primary care appointments. Telehealth offers a digital link between veterans in one location with a medical provider in another geographic setting. This makes it possible for veterans to come to one of VA Black Hills Health Care System's community-based outpatient clinics or VA Medical Centers and connect with their medical provider, who may be in a hospital more than a hundred miles away. Primary Care Physician Assistant David Cohen, who works with vets who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn, says, "We wanted to expand and see patients where it's more convenient for them."

Cohen describes Telehealth as similar to a Skype video chat, except with much better quality and with the addition of medical equipment capable of performing a comprehensive exam. The Telehealth cart has monitors for two-way viewing, peripheral attachments for examining the ears, eyes, nose and throat, and contains a total exam camera extension for taking close-up photos of a patient's skin. In the near future, medical providers will be able to transmit and receive heart and lung sounds clearly with a secure broadband or Internet connection and the use of a stethoscope that is already equipped on every cart. A Telehealth clinical technician assists with the exam from the veteran's location. Cohen says, "I will be able to listen to their heart and lung sounds over the machine. The technician will hold a stethoscope up to the veteran, and I will hear it. The technician can also hold a small camera to the veteran's ear or throat so that I can look inside them. The picture quality is actually clearer than if I were there, looking inside myself."

Cohen says that the Telehealth option is especially appealing to his patients, as most of them are of a younger generation, and they embrace new technology like this. "Younger patients are familiar with the idea of this kind of technology," he said. "They love the idea that they can use their time more wisely. With working and school, they can't always take time off for an appointment."

This new option has become a big time saver for some veterans. "I have patients in North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska and the Pierre area," Cohen said. "Why should my Pierre patient have to drive two hours to the VA Medical Center for a follow-up appointment that will take 15 minutes?"

Cohen is the first primary care physician to begin utilizing Telehealth for follow-up appointments at VA Black Hills Health Care System. He has received overwhelming positive feedback from his patients and continues to be excited about this new option and how it can help veterans. "I have the best job in the VA. I really do," said Cohen.

--VA Black Hills Health Care System

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