

Telemedicine Geriatric Consultation Service  
Dan Reece, MSW

While the limited number of geriatric professionals is a national concern, access to geriatric services in rural areas is particularly problematic. Many of these communities have a high percentage of older adults. Rural health providers have difficulties accessing specialty services.

Geriatric interdisciplinary teams have been found to be effective in delivering high quality, evidence-based care, with positive outcomes on patients' functioning and quality of life. These teams can provide comprehensive, coordinated, care in partnership with patients, caregivers and other service organizations. The team examines a broader range of components that can affect patients' health, including social and emotional factors. Teams are usually comprised of a geriatric physician, advanced practice geriatric nurse, pharmacist and social worker. Other professionals can participate on an ad hoc basis, e.g. physical therapists, dieticians and chaplains.

We propose using telehealth technology to organize geriatric interdisciplinary teams, pooling the expertise of geriatric professionals in distant locations with local health care professionals and care providers. Team members will have clearly defined roles. This blended team will bridge potential gaps between primary care providers and the consulting specialists. Consultation processes will comply with CMS billing guidelines. Where possible, telehealth technology will be shared with other medical specialty services. Outcomes will include clinical quality indicators, e.g. reduction in medications and improvement in depression scores. Financial measures will include costs and revenue per unit of service and in aggregate. Reductions in emergency department visits and inpatient hospital admissions will also be measured.

The service will be piloted in partnership between the Gerontology Institute in Oregon and PeaceHealth Southeast Alaska in Ketchikan. The target population will be patients in skilled and long-term care facilities. The team will be organized by January 2008. Technical planning and billing processes will be completed by June 2008. Telehealth consultations will begin in September 2008. Based on the outcomes of this limited pilot, telehealth consultations will then be offered to rural communities in Oregon.

Please [email Dan](#) with any questions or comments regarding this project.

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