

Wyoming Telehealth Network

December Provider Spotlight



1. When did you first hear about remote patient monitoring? How would you explain this telehealth service to people who are not familiar with it?

I first heard about Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) in the 2018. We were offering telemedicine through our clinics and started investigating peripheral otoscopes and stethoscopes to enhance the telemedicine visit. It was through that investigation process that my husband (InstaClinic co-owner, Dr. Daniel Surdam), and I started seeing the early RPM devices.

Remote Patient Monitoring is a healthcare service that allows healthcare providers to monitor patients' vital signs and health data remotely, often using technology like wearable devices and mobile apps. To explain it to someone unfamiliar, I would say it's a way for providers to keep track of your health outside of the clinic or hospital, using devices that send your health data to them for regular assessment, which can lead to more personalized care.

2. When did you begin offering remote patient monitoring services? What prompted the need to offer these services?

We began offering remote patient monitoring services during the pandemic. We recognized the benefit of sending ill patients home with pulse oximeters and thermometers to help monitor their vital signs. From there, we recognized the potential benefits it could bring to our patients, such as improved chronic disease management, reduced hospital admissions, and increased patient engagement. After a career in reactionary medicine, I had a desire to provide a more proactive approach to our patients and felt that RPM would be a valuable solution.

3. What motivates you to continue offering remote patient monitoring?

It's not what, but who. Betty, David, Joy, and all of our other patients who have seen value in our services and who we have built relationships with have motivated me to continue to offer these services. We can see with not only data trends, but also with their testimonies, that we are a proactive part of their care team, and our efforts are helping them achieve better outcomes and more personal healthcare.

4. What is your proudest accomplishment with remote patient monitoring?

Technology can be a difficult obstacle to overcome with some of our patients. We have worked with one patient for many years, not hours, but years, on adoption. First it was schedule, then correct pairing, then she upgraded her phone and we needed to re-pair the devices. It went on and on, but we all persistent. One day when I was checking on our patients in our software, I saw her readings come through. I was so proud! I remember celebrating with our team saying, "We did it!!!! Randy is up and running!"

5. What advice would you give patients wanting to try remote patient monitoring?

I like to think of RPM as something you didn't know you needed until you had it, like Air pods, or a rice cooker. Remote Patient Monitoring is easy and reassuring once you build the habit of measuring your vital signs. We try to make it as simple as possible and really go above and beyond to help our patients achieve success with set up and consistency. I would encourage anyone who is curious to try it! Most insurance plans cover this service and it will improve your health.

6. What advice would you give providers wanting to start offering remote patient monitoring?

Providers need a designated program owner or to partner with an established RPM company to be successful. Having someone invested and willing to lead the charge will make all the difference when it comes to this program. Healthcare providers are busy, and patients are busy. You need someone dedicated who will make the time with patients to help them see the value the program and be successful.

7. What was the biggest barrier in providing remote patient monitoring services? How have you overcome it?

Patient adoption is the biggest barrier. I wish I could say we have overcome this, but we haven't. We really struggle with patients utilizing the service. Patients have concerns about insurance coverage, if they really need the service, and concern that it will be arduous. New habits are difficult to engrain and asking someone to create new habits for their health can often fall last on their list of priorities or can feel overwhelming.

8. How do you think implementing remote patient monitoring has affected how things are done at different healthcare organizations now that the pandemic is over?

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of telehealth, but we still have a long way to go with the adoption of remote patient monitoring. Remote monitoring will eventually play a crucial role in healthcare by providing more flexible and convenient care options, but we aren't there yet.

9. Is there anything you learned the hard way in remote patient monitoring implementation?

Yes! It's all hard. This is such a new technology that some insurance companies such as BCBS of Wyoming don't cover the expense and Cigna only covers three diagnoses. Thankfully, Medicare and Medicaid readily embrace and cover the services. Staying on top of every changing billing and coding practices and the actual technology is extremely important. Providers have limited time with their patients and this can be just one more thing to educate patients on. Creating an environment where the providers and patients alike see value is a challenge.

10. Do you have any remote patient monitoring hacks or tricks?

Apple watches and continuous glucose monitors are our best friends. Patients don't have to think about measuring their biometrics 16 days a month (the requirement for reimbursement of equipment) because the data is being fed into our software continuously.