Telepodiatry: Taking Care of High Risk Patients in the 21st Century

Janice P. Clark, DPM 1; Mary Elaine Taylor, RN, BSN 1; Shirley Ramey, LPN 1; James Watkins, MD 1; David Armstrong, DPM, PhD, MD 2.

1 Grand Junction Veterans Affairs Hospital, Grand Junction, Colorado. 2 University of Arizona, Southern Arizona Limb Salvage Alliance, Tucson, Arizona.

BACKGROUND

• Telehealth services at the Grand Junction Veterans Affairs Hospital consist of dermatology, cardiology, ophthalmology, chronic home care, and podiatry, and assists over 35,000 patients in Veterans Integrated Service Network 19.
• There are approximately 22 million Veterans living today with 6.1 million (28%) living in rural areas.1
• The mission of the VHA Office of Rural Health is to improve access and quality of care for enrolled rural Veterans by developing evidence-based polices and innovative practices to support the needs of Veterans living in remote areas.1

OBJECTIVE

• To assess the ability of telehealth to provide efficient, timely podiatric care.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

• An annual patient satisfaction survey of all telehealth services was performed in August 2013. The population surveyed consisted of patients from satellite clinics in Craig, Glenwood Springs, and Montrose, Colorado, and Moab, Utah. A telepodiatry examination protocol was developed in a which real-time evaluation is conducted using high resolution clinical video. Examination components include assessment of lower extremity vasculature, neurological status, wound characteristics, pedal deformity, imaging studies and laboratory results.
• The podiatrist then provides a treatment plan for the remote facility, to include wound care, antibiotic regimen, prosthetics recommendations, and determination of additional studies or surgical intervention.

RESULTS

• From August 2012 through July 2013, there were 2169 unique patient participants in the Grand Junction VA telehealth program. There were 5763 encounters, which included 223 chronic care home patients.
• The August 2013 patient satisfaction survey allowed patients to rate their satisfaction with the telehealth services on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not satisfied, and 5 being very satisfied.
• The overall patient satisfaction rate was 4.71 out of a possible score of 5.

CONCLUSIONS

• There is a high degree of patient satisfaction with telehealth visits. Telepodiatry will allow timely, effective assessment of complex lower extremity conditions, while reducing expense and preventing delays in treatment.

REFERENCES

• VA Office of Rural Health Fact Sheet. April 2013.