

Case Study



OTN.teledermSF has a positive impact on quality of care for clients in Long Term Care and Special Needs homes

A telemedicine success story from RCHS

Experienced nurses Lee Ann Irwin, Virginia Wilson and Amber Laidlaw are employed as Telemedicine Coordinators by Rideau Community Health Services (RCHS), a non-profit, community governed organization. The organization's mantra is, as a team, we can make a difference. Two ways to achieve that goal are increasing access to care for those those who face barriers, and adopt and implement people centred care

Based on consultation with partner sites dermatology has been identified as a priority area in many geographies across the southeast LHIN, including the south Lanark, Leeds and Grenville counties. They are particularly suited to consultation by telemedicine, a time-proven tool for increasing access to health care and breaking down barriers.

Irwin, Wilson and Laidlaw shared a recent RCHS success story that demonstrates how OTN.teledermSF® (StoreForward) has improved access to dermatologists for clients in Long Term Care (LTC) and Special Needs (SN) homes.

**Telemedicine Applied:
OTN.teledermSF connects clients to
dermatologists electronically**

Irwin recalled two individuals in their nineties living in a Long Term Care home in her region. They were referred by their respective physicians to a dermatologist. Before the introduction of OTN.teledermSF in the region in February of 2013, Irwin's elderly clients waited as long as 18 months for an appointment and then travelled a considerable distance to see a dermatologist.

Diagnosis and treatment recommendations are returned within two weeks or less with OTN.teledermSF.

Now Irwin, or one of her colleagues, travels to a LTC or SN home armed with a digital camera. She takes photographs of the skin condition and forwards the images directly from her laptop to an Ontario-based dermatologist participating in the program. A diagnosis and treatment recommendations are returned quickly, usually within two weeks.

Irwin recalled the amazement expressed by her elderly clients. "They were in awe of the technology. They couldn't believe it was that easy. They really enjoyed the fact that they did not have to leave their home."



**The Bonus:
Cost savings, improved quality of life**

Wilson believes the quality of life of their clients and caregivers improves too. Caregivers, who once had to escort clients to an appointment do not lose time away from work or incur costs such as parking and gas. The elderly clients do not have to contend with bad weather that can lead to slips and falls. Stress is reduced, because there is no need to leave familiar surroundings to meet with a strange doctor.

"...the quality of life of their clients and caregivers improves too."

This belief was backed by data Irwin pulled. In April 2013, the Coordinators at RCHS conducted ten dermatological consultations using OTN.teledermSF. These ten consults saved 2,144 kilometers of travel for the patients. At RCHS's assumed cost of \$0.50 per km, savings for travel alone totalled \$1,072, to say nothing of the time savings.

Irwin, Wilson and Laidlaw noted that physicians that had stopped referring patients to dermatologists because of the lengthy wait time for in-person consults are once again referring patients to a dermatologist because OTN.teledermSF is so efficient and swift.

**Advice to New Users:
Community partnerships are essential
for success**

Organizations like RCHS are effective because they develop partnerships with local Family Health Teams, hospitals, CHCs and mental health organizations. The partners refer clients, while RCHS provides the expertise if the Telemedicine Nurse Coordinators to facilitate a telemedicine event.

Motivating physicians to try OTN.teledermSF once is the challenge, because using telemedicine does require a change in routine, which is not always welcomed. Irwin, Wilson and Laidlaw take pleasure in demonstrating the efficiency of OTN.teledermSF to physicians, because they know that one request for a consultation from a physician to a dermatologist is enough to convert that physician to a regular referrer.



RCHS Telemedicine Coordinator Lee Ann Irwin

In 2007 Lee Ann Irwin graduated from the Registered Practical Nurse Program of St. Lawrence College with distinction. She is a member of the SE LHIN Health Professional Advisory Committee. She was a Community Visiting Nurse for a number of years for St. Elizabeth Health Care. She joined Rideau Community Health Services in November of 2012 as a Telemedicine Coordinator.

Rideau is a non-profit community governed health and social service agency that engages individuals and communities to improve health. RCHS telemedicine services serve the South Lanark, Leeds and Grenville region. RCHS telemedicine vision is "as a team we can make a difference and improve access for those who face barriers."

Telemedicine is about making health care connections and bridging the distance.





Telemedicine for Your Health Care Practice

Telemedicine is secure, safe and reliable. Over a decade of use in Ontario has proven its effectiveness as a tool for specialist consults and continuing education.

Patients do not pay additional fees. Physicians may bill OHIP for telemedicine at a premium.

OTN is a recognized provider of healthcare distance education. That skill and experience is applied to all online telemedicine training modules.

As the world leader in telemedicine, OTN helps Ontario get more out of the healthcare system, bridging the distance of time and geography to bring more patients the care they need, where and when they need it. Using innovative technology OTN streamlines the health care process, while also expanding the way knowledge is shared and how the medical community interacts with each other and with patients. The efficiencies achieved help health care budgets go farther. Funded by the Government of Ontario, OTN is a not-for-profit organization. For more information, go to www.otn.ca