

Telehealth allows monitoring of patient health in comfort of home

The Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) of the Treasure Coast has served residents throughout Indian River County for more than 30 years with home health-care services ranging from companions to personal care providers, skilled nursing care using leading-edge technology and equipment as well as hospice care.

Services are provided wherever a patient lives, whether in a private residence, an apartment or condominium complex, an assisted-living facility, or even a nursing home, all without regard for a patient's ability to pay.

Now, the VNA expands the definition of home health care still further with its Home Telehealth Initiative.

"Home Telehealth uses a remote monitoring system connecting the patient's residence with our office so our nurses can evaluate a patient's vital signs daily from a computer screen in our office," says Margot Kornicks, RN, BSN, MBA, vice president and chief clinical operations officer for the VNA.

"The program is designed for patients living with chronic conditions like congestive heart failure, diabetes, cancer, or COPD, as well as for acute care patients who are not sick enough to be in a skilled nursing facility but who still need their vital signs monitored on a daily basis following a hospitalization, a change in medications, or therapy."

Kerry Bartlett, CFRE, MBA, chief advancement officer for the VNA, points out that the Home Telehealth Initiative is designed to complement, not replace, patients' relationships with their doctors, and to help patients who need daily monitoring to self-manage their

chronic conditions so they can remain independent.

"We enroll patients in the Home Telehealth Initiative only after a doctor's referral," says Kerry, "and though this technology will be of benefit to many patients, no one will be forced to participate. For patients who are able to work with the user-friendly monitor and devices we bring to their home, Home Telehealth is an excellent way to help them take a more active role in maintaining their health."

Margot is quick to point out that Home Telehealth is not a new technology. "Over the past 10 years, Home Telehealth has proven to be a valuable tool in maintaining and improving patient health in other parts of the country," she reports. "It helps to reduce the need for rehospitalization, to improve patients' quality of life, and to eliminate unnecessary home health and doctor visits, and this decreases the overall cost of providing health care. Outcome data show that patients who self-manage their diseases stay independent longer, which is good news for the growing number of baby boomers who are living with chronic conditions that can be self-managed with the right tools. Home Telehealth provides those tools."

The Home Telehealth system operates over the phone lines. A discreet, small monitor is used in the patient's home to collect clinical information like blood glucose levels, blood pressure, pulse rate, oxygenation levels, and weight. Depending on the



PHOTO BY NERISSA JOHNSON

ATTENTION TO DETAIL. Nurse practitioners like Kelly Partain teach patients how to use the telehealth monitors.

patient's needs, different devices are used to collect specific information, to remind patients about doctor appointments or medications, and to ask the patient to respond to questions to provide additional details about their condition.

A nurse practitioner reviews the data every day, and referring physicians can log onto a secure website from any computer to view their patients' data as well as to receive the most timely information about their patients' status.

"If the readings indicate the patient is having a medical problem, one of our nurses can quickly be dispatched to the patient's home," says Margot. "The system also makes it possible for us to recognize subtle yet significant changes in

a patient's medical condition between scheduled home visits. These changes may be so slight that the patient is not even aware of them. Having this system in place will provide us with another means to forestall problems rather than to react to them. The Home Telehealth Initiative is another way the VNA is customizing its care for our patients." **FHCN**—Billie S. Noakes

Here to help

The VNA provides community wellness, home health care, and hospice services to the residents of Indian River, Brevard, and northern St. Lucie counties. To receive services, you, your doctor, or your hospital's discharge planner can call the VNA at (772) 567-5551 or (800) 749-5760.



The Visiting Nurse
Association of the Treasure
Coast is online at
www.vnatc.com.