

Reviewing a school-based telehealth program



INDUSTRY: Non-profit health

EMPLOYEES: 3,000+

PRODUCTS: Viewpoint and connected peripheral devices

The 1,200-student district is in a rural community, which makes providing access to healthcare more difficult

Summary

Blessing Health System, comprised of Blessing Hospital, Illini Community Hospital, Blessing Physician Services, Hannibal Clinic and 18 alternative care sites, serves primarily rural communities in Illinois, Missouri and Iowa. As part of its mission of improving the health of the communities it serves, **Blessing Health System has partnered with the Palmyra Area School District to initiate the region's first-ever school-based telehealth program.**

Challenge

Blessing Health System faces two key challenges in its mission to provide high-quality care to patients associated with the school district. First, Palmyra Area School District employees struggle with high-deductible health insurance plans.

Second, the 1,200-student district—covering preschool through high school—is in a rural community, which makes providing access to healthcare more difficult. **Blessing Health System, along with the school district, wanted to be able to offer students and staff members better access to care to keep them out of the doctor's office and in school.**



Solution

Telehealth can mitigate many of the issues associated with both access to healthcare in rural communities and high-deductible health insurance plans. Telehealth allows students to stay at school—and parents and employees to stay at work—while simultaneously receiving healthcare.

Blessing Health System's key requirements for selecting a telehealth provider included technology that was highly reliable and flexible, with a record of excellent customer support, including the ability to quickly re-establish a connection before it impacted patient care. Together, Palmyra Area School District and Blessing Health System decided to partner with Teladoc Health, which can provide support services to help launch telehealth programs and attract patients in addition to providing the underlying platform.

Blessing Health System's hybrid telehealth model emphasized continuity of care. Its unique model relied heavily on the school nurse to determine if a telehealth visit was necessary. Also, all physicians associated with this program reside within a two-mile radius of the campus, meaning an in-person visit with the same provider could be easily administered if appropriate.

Care model workflow



Nurse contacts a parent or guardian and reviews the patient data



Nurse contacts the Blessing clinic and proctors a telehealth visit between the student and physician



The visit itself is conducted on a laptop with the Teladoc Health Viewpoint technology and any necessary attached peripherals

Patient symptoms

75%

OF VISITS WERE SKIN-RELATED

10%

WERE COMMON COLD

15%

WERE OTHER CONDITIONS

Results

The program quickly succeeded in delivering healthcare while still keeping kids at school and parents at work. Through marketing in the form of news coverage and community outreach, **the district has been able to get 80% of students to opt in to its telehealth program.**

Palmyra Area School District and Blessing Health System estimate the program's telehealth treatment was able to keep an additional one to two students a week in school.

To help make student patients comfortable and ease adoption among a population that is unfamiliar with telehealth, **the program team launched a teddy bear clinic.** This initiative gave students the opportunity to bring in a stuffed animal, which acts as the student's patient, and familiarize themselves with the telehealth technology while allowing parents to observe. This helped validate the reliability, confidentiality and ease of use of the new telehealth solution. It also doubled as a technical test of the technology and support services.

Starting with its initial primary care offering, Blessing Health System is looking to expand into behavioral health after developing strategic privacy procedures and receiving additional funding. Blessing Health System would also like to expand into more school districts in the area and to create a COVID-19 plan to provide continuous wellness and chronic care check-ins.

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