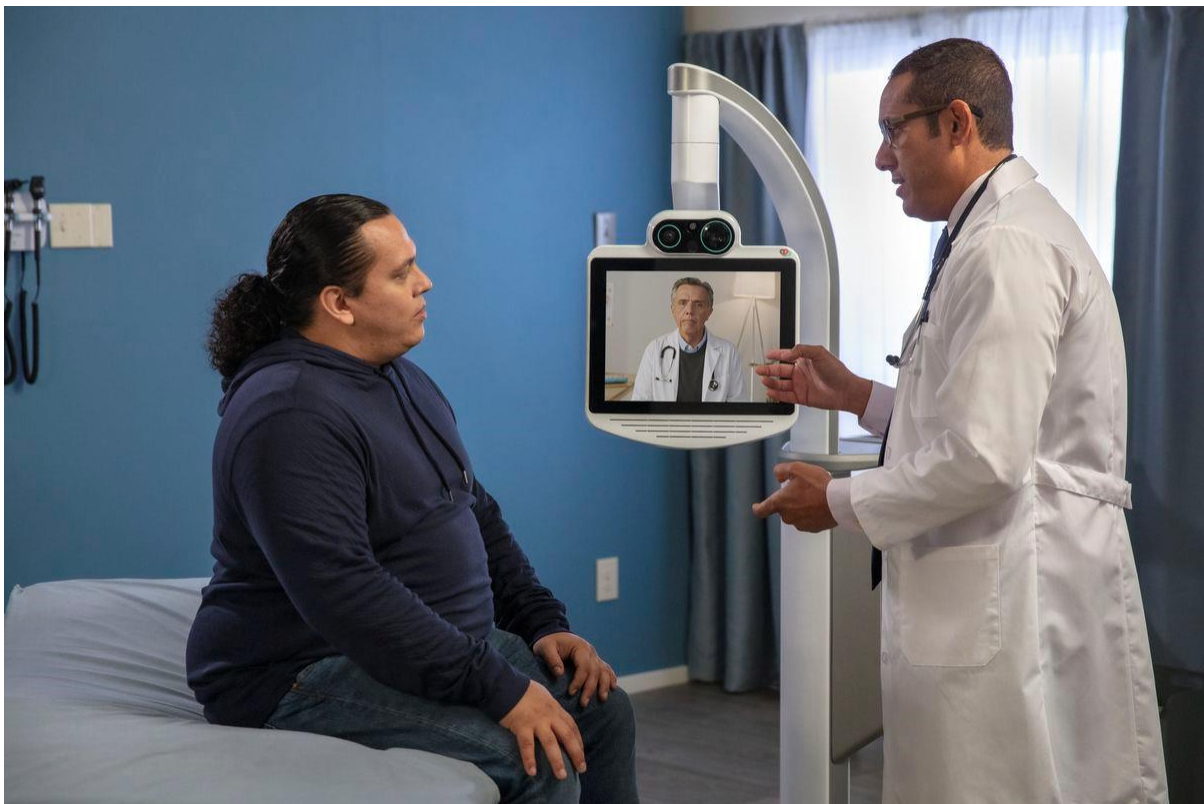


Virtual care: creating access for primary and emergency care



A patient receives a virtual consultation from medical practitioners via Teladoc. Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and Teladoc Health Canada partnered to launch virtual primary care and virtual emergency room care, fully covered by the province.

Dr. Marina Malak is a family physician who joined Teladoc Health Canada to provide virtual care to people in Newfoundland and Labrador without family doctors. When she examined the images that a patient – who lived thousands of kilometers away – had uploaded during an appointment, she immediately diagnosed shingles.

“Without virtual services, this patient, who experienced frequent rashes, may have brushed it off and not received appropriate and timely care – particularly since the nearest hospital was four hours away,” says Dr. Malak.

That same week, a couple in rural Newfoundland brought in a young child in respiratory distress to the local hospital.

Dr. Simerpreet Sandhanwalia, an emergency physician, was also drawn to Teladoc to help keep small and rural ERs open in the province. She was on shift that night, working virtually and connected to a Teladoc device placed at the hospital.

The device, used in emergency rooms, allows the patient in the hospital and the remote doctor to see and speak to each other via high-definition video and high-quality audio.

The technology can also upload medical images and connect to peripheral devices, such as a stethoscope, so the doctor can examine a patient with the aid of the ER nurse and other clinicians on the ground.

“The child was quite ill but, by working collaboratively with our exemplary nurses and paramedics, we were able to stabilize and treat the child,” says Dr. Sandhanwalia. “The parents were thankful to receive quick attention – they were scared.”

Both stories show the contribution that virtual health care is making to provide high-quality care to Canadians. Last fall, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services and Teladoc Health Canada partnered to launch virtual primary care and virtual emergency room care, fully covered by the province.

Joby McKenzie, PhD, Managing Director of Teladoc Health Canada, calls it an example of how virtual clinicians working with state-of-the-art technology can collaborate with health systems to improve health care for all Canadians.

“We’re honoured to be working with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador,” McKenzie says. “There are nearly 6.5 million people in Canada without a family doctor, and rural and smaller emergency departments across the country experience frequent closures due to staffing shortages.

“Leveraging our virtual care technologies and national clinical network, we can partner with health systems to support their unique context,” she adds. “What we’re seeing is that, by integrating virtual care as part of the system, people are getting access to high-quality health care services when they need it.”

Teladoc Health Canada has over 20 years of experience delivering health care to Canadians, including a history of working with health care systems to improve care. Today, approximately nine million people across the country have access to Teladoc’s medical services.

In Saskatoon, Sask., Teladoc's remote devices have been used at the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital for over a decade. Physicians use the technology to support the pediatric intensive care unit, giving children in remote communities, including First Nations, access to specialists. This has resulted in a 63-per-cent reduction in transfers of children out of their communities to seek care.

Pediatric intensivist Dr. Gregory Hansen says the visual cues and quick action enabled by Teladoc's technology is crucial.

"Getting visuals via a remote device is critical because children can deteriorate rapidly," he explains. "If we have sight of a child who is acutely ill, we can determine very quickly how to treat the child, what resources we will need, and determine whether the child can remain in their own community or needs to be transferred."

Dr. McKenzie adds, "I know that for all of us, no matter where we are in this vast country, when we're ill, we want to be connected to a Canadian health care provider who can help us as quickly and conveniently as possible. Teladoc Health Canada is committed to working with health system leaders and clinicians to enable these connections and be part of the solution in addressing current gaps in care."

Dr. Calvin Bergen, an emergency physician, who is also with Teladoc Health Canada, is encouraged by the breadth of treatments that are possible remotely.

"Besides treating infections, cuts and broken bones, we can also diagnose and treat life-threatening cases such as stroke and cardiac events," he says. "I had a case where a patient came in with cardiac arrhythmia. In collaboration with the ER nurse, we were able to treat and stabilize the patient. It's amazing what we can do virtually!"