

LEVERAGING RPM TO REMOVE BARRIERS AND ENSURE VETERANS RECEIVE THE CARE THEY NEED

Of all populations, our veterans need—and deserve—the best quality care available. Virtual care technology and remote monitoring devices are easy to implement, cost-effective solutions that remove barriers and make that care possible.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought with it both challenges and opportunities to providers nationwide. In just a matter of weeks—sometimes days—providers implemented telehealth solutions to accommodate virtual visits, created curbside check-in procedures, and updated CPT coding protocols for Covid-19. Now that mass vaccinations are beginning, the end of the pandemic is finally in sight. Clinics are now, or soon will be, working towards full in-person service once again. The question for many is whether to continue offering virtual care ongoing. For those with a large population of veterans, the answer should be a resounding “yes.”

Veterans are among a population that needs more care than other demographics. First, they're more likely to suffer from chronic conditions than the average civilian—conditions that require complex and ongoing care. Second, they face excessive barriers to care due to physical limitations, transportation issues, and even social stigma. In addition, one in every five veterans lives alone, which makes them extremely susceptible to mental illness, especially problematic during the pandemic.

The best way to mitigate these challenges and better care for this vulnerable population is through a comprehensive chronic care management (CCM) program powered by remote patient monitoring (RPM) technology. The good news is that the telehealth software and processes are already in place and can serve as the foundation to quickly get these programs in place. This is a great opportunity that providers can leverage to better care for veterans when and where they need it—in a clinic, at home, or in a VA facility. **Following are just a few of the benefits RPM technology can bring to a CCM program.**

Ease of use

Veterans often lack access to smartphones or tablets and may find using such devices challenging. Fortunately, there are now remote devices designed just for this demographic. One such device is a simple hub with a nurse call-out button that sits on a side table so veterans always have fast access to help. These devices are generally “plug and play” so they don't require pairing or complex connectivity. Some hubs have a screen so the patient and care team members can connect visually, which can be beneficial for interactions such as telehealth appointments

Reminders

Those with chronic conditions—especially multiple, complex conditions—often have complicated care plans. RPM technology can make adherence easier for veterans by providing timely medication reminders and appointment reminders.

Mental health/PTSD support

Many RPM solutions include behavioral health assessments and monitoring to proactively identify new or deteriorating mental health conditions. This allows for faster, more effective intervention.

Self-reporting devices

Remote devices like blood pressure cuffs and pulse oximeters are generally simple enough to use but often require patients to document and report results. Newer devices automatically report results in real-time to the care team. This gives caregivers timely information that allows for quick outreach when readings are concerning—all without burdening the veteran.

Non-intrusive wearables

Most veterans have multiple—and more complex—chronic conditions. Blood pressure and oxygen levels alone aren't sufficient indicators of problematic issues. For example, veterans with diabetes may have a quickly escalating foot ulcer infection without knowing it. Sensory insoles can detect even the subtlest of temperature changes and send that information to the care team for fast intervention. Likewise, fall-detectors immediately alert the care team so help can be quickly dispatched.

Of all populations, our veterans need—and deserve—the best quality care available. Virtual care technology and remote monitoring devices are easy to implement, cost-effective solutions that remove barriers and make that care possible. Fortunately, most providers already have telehealth software and processes in place. It's time to take this technology to the next level by making it a part of a chronic care management and remote patient monitoring program. Our veterans have sacrificed so much for us. Now it's our turn.