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Beyond Covid: From Virtual Care to Connected Health

Economic Impact of Maintaining Rural Health

Peter Caplan, MPCD, MS; Kathy Letendre, MHSA

Tue, March 2 @ 1:00 PM EST

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**Beyond Covid:
From Virtual Care
to Connected Health**

ABOUT PETER

30 years in healthcare

24 years Telehealth Project & Program Management

10 years Regional Planner & Healthcare Economist

Associate Track Director & Clinical Instructor, University of Colorado, Clinical Health Sciences Program

Masters of Planning & Community Development, Masters in Economics, University of Colorado



Innovative
Cost effective
Clinically sustainable

Clinics **Employers**
Hospitals **Schools/Libraries**
Providers **Nursing Homes**

Why Virtual Care Matters

**Changing the Economic
Dynamic of Rural Communities**

Economic Impact of Virtual Care in Rural Communities

Challenges

- **Providing healthcare services in the community**
- **Maintaining local healthcare facilities and employees (sustainable revenue models)**
- **Insuring timely access to care**
- **Reducing dependence on distant providers and facilities**
- **Fostering patient adoption and engagement**

Solutions

- **Deploy telehealth technologies**
- **Train local clinicians to use telehealth technologies**
- **Redesign clinical workflows to integrate telehealth technologies**
- **Educate and promote telehealth**
- **Utilize vacant office space or libraries to create telehealth pop-up clinics shared by community providers**

Primary Benefits of Virtual/Connected Healthcare in Rural Communities

Greater recruitment and retention of local healthcare staff and support services (lab, imaging, pharmacy)

Enhanced opportunities for attracting employees to local businesses with healthcare services available locally

Convenient Access to Remote Learning

CME Programs for clinicians

CME Programs for technical and administrative staff

Health Education Courses for patients

Reduced carbon emissions from fewer miles driven by both providers and patients and their families.

Fewer patients bypassing or being transferred from local facilities leading to significant cost savings.

Additional benefits

More clinical services are provided locally resulting in fewer patient transfers and greater retained revenues

Less travel related expenses for families visiting their loved ones in the hospital

Reduced workers' comp loss time for employers resulting from workers no longer having to travel for follow-up care

Factors driving Telehealth adoption

According to the Center for Connected Health Policy, adoption of telehealth is driven by:

- **Policy**
- **Technology innovation/integration**
- **Financing & Reimbursement**
- **Health system and leadership transformation**
- **Clinical evidence/best practice**
- **Clinical capacity & provider adoption**
- **Consumer awareness & demand**

Telehealth is dependent on robust and reliable broadband service and though many rural areas lag in broadband deployment, progress is being made with funding & programmatic efforts from the:

- **FCC, USDA, HHS/CMS, FQHCs**
- **State/county health departments**
- **Private foundations**
- **Local employers**
- **Regional telecoms**

Clinical Opportunities for Telehealth Utilization

According to a CDC study, the five leading causes of death in the United States between 1999 and 2014 were:

- Heart disease**
- Cancer**
- Unintentional injury**
- Chronic lower respiratory disease**
- Stroke**

Together, these accounted for more than 1.6 million deaths (approximately 62% of all deaths) in 2014.

All of these conditions are currently being treated and managed using telehealth technologies, which drives local revenue and employment

In Conclusion

When a rural hospital closes (several hundred have over the past few years), it's impact is felt across the entire community. As the largest employer of professionals, whose incomes support many of the local businesses, hospital administrators have an obligation to deploy any technology that can generate a sustainable revenue.

The loss of healthcare professionals typically results in a downward spiral leading to an outmigration of residents and businesses that relied on the hospital for their revenues.

All citizens and employers have a responsibility to support their hospital. By utilizing telehealth technology, communities ensure that:

- Students can have access to and training for healthcare careers (remote education for nursing, therapists, lab techs, aides, medical assistants, technical support, administrative and a host of other ancillary workers)
- Schools remain viable with new students
- Nursing homes and assisted living facilities remain filled
- Maintain a sense of stability, identity, and local pride.

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Contact Info

Peter M. Caplan, MPCD, MS - Telehealth Strategy & Implementation Advisor

Ingenium Digital Health Advisors

IngeniumDigitalHealth.com

(720) 261-5458

Peter.Caplan@IngeniumAdvisors.net



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