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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:

Laureate

Year:

2013

Organization Name:

Secure Telehealth

Organization URL:

<http://www.securetelehealth.com/>

Project Name:

Sustainable Telemedicine for Mentally Ill in Rural Idaho

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:

Human Services

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

Specialized treatment for serious mental health disorders is available in most metropolitan areas but is completely lacking in many rural areas. Telepsychiatry (video conferencing between doctor and patient) has demonstrated success in bridging the distance gap to provide services to rural consumers, but the high cost of the specialized video conferencing equipment traditionally used for telepsychiatry has put this option out of reach for most of the clinics that need it to help the seriously mentally ill, including Idaho Behavioral Health of Boise, Idaho. Idaho Behavioral Health turned to Pittsburgh-based Secure Telehealth, who contracted with them to provide video conferencing technology using a new, innovative software solution on ordinary PCs outfitted with Logitech high-

definition webcams and specialized microphones to achieve audio and video quality similar to more expensive specialized equipment. This project demonstrated that inexpensive PCs and Logitech High Definition webcams can provide a video conferencing experience for doctors and patients similar to specialized video conferencing hardware at a fraction of the price. For the first time, Idaho Behavioral Health was able to provide sustainable telepsychiatry services to its rural consumers without relying on grants to pay for it. The innovation also proved to be easier to use than specialized equipment, easier to set up, and at least as secure. Security is paramount because confidentiality must be maintained according to strict federal HIPAA guidelines to safeguard protected health information. Fast PCs, broadband Internet connections, cloud computing, and Logitech HD webcams have combined to make telehealth simple and affordable for Idaho Behavioral Health. These four innovations are packaged and supported by a HIPAA Business Associate Partner (Secure Telehealth) and used by Idaho Behavioral Health to promote and advance the public welfare, benefit society, and change the world for the better.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

This project was implemented in January 2011.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

The implementation of this project is complete. All of Idaho Behavioral Health's telemedicine centers have been set up. The project is ongoing. Severely and persistently mentally ill consumers must continue to see the doctor on an ongoing basis for medication management. Every week there are new patients who begin receiving treatment via this innovative service delivery method.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

Dr. Thomas Young works with patients who live in the remote area of Mountain Home, Idaho, many of whom have no access to transportation to see him in Boise. Historically, patients (or taxpayers) have had to pay round-trip taxi fare (\$104 per trip) to see the doctor. The cost and hassle of spending the better part of a day traveling to see the doctor often resulted in missed appointments. One Mountain Home patient describes it this way: "If I had to go to Boise to see the

doc, I would find another medication manager." This is easier said than done in a community such as Mountain Home, with no psychiatrists available. The patient comments further: "Mentally ill people don't do good driving a long way all the time!" Missed appointments result in lower compliance with medications, which could result in relapses. Follow-up visits in their own community via telepsychiatry are much easier for the patient to keep, without sacrificing quality. Dr. Young states: "If I know the patient, then I can get adequate information on follow-up visits via telehealth. The same holds true for the patient: they get to know me in that first visit and then feel comfortable on subsequent telehealth visits." The regular telehealth visits improve patients' compliance with their medications. Improved medication compliance results in fewer emergency hospitalizations, fewer emergency calls to child protection services, and less involvement with the criminal justice system. As Dr. Young describes: "At least two Mountain Home patients have been kept out of higher cost hospital care or psychiatric services by participating in telehealth sessions with me." These two adults have historically been chronic users of high cost services such as emergency rooms or inpatient hospitalizations.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

This project is an innovation that is being adopted and tailored for other rural behavioral health organizations all over the country. The technology is being adopted in hospitals, primary care physicians' offices, mental health clinics, correctional facilities, schools, and skilled nursing homes. All of these organizations and their patients are benefiting from the low-cost, high-quality telehealth service provided by doctors using regular PCs and high-definition Logitech webcams over broadband Internet connections.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

Why not use Skype for telehealth? Skype is not HIPAA Compliant. All Behavioral Health organizations in the United States are covered entities under the federal HIPAA Regulations (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) of 1996. Covered entities must safeguard the confidentiality of their protected health information in ways that Skype cannot do. Also, tech support providers must occasionally be able to join meetings with patients present in order to fix problems without delaying or missing any appointments. This intrusion constitutes a breach of HIPAA security unless the tech support provider signs a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA) with the covered entity. The BAA insures that the tech support provider has adhered to the strict security measures



required by HIPAA and has their own security measures in place to preclude unauthorized access to protected health information. Secure Telehealth provides these assurances.