

Benefits of Telehealth in Reducing Readmissions at Colonial Park Care Center, a Skilled Nursing Facility and a PinnacleHealth Partner

The Future of Telehealth at PinnacleHealth



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About PinnacleHealth

PinnacleHealth is a pioneer not-for-profit healthcare system dedicated to providing and improving the health and quality of life for the people of central Pennsylvania since 1873. A proven leader in medical innovation, PinnacleHealth offers a wide range of services from primary care, to complex surgeries, and Magnet® recognition for nursing excellence.

The PinnacleHealth network includes four campuses (Community, Harrisburg, West Shore, and Polyclinic) as well as medical services such as family practice, imaging, outpatient surgery, and oncology at multiple locations throughout the region.



“Accountable care measures require innovative strategic planning to remain financially viable. Telehealth can help meet these needs for health systems and their partners through three main avenues: controlling costs, preventing readmissions, and early intervention in patient care setting.”

—Christian H. Caicedo, MD, MBA, CPE
Vice President of Operations and Medical Director for West Shore Hospital, and Associate Chief Medical Officer, PinnacleHealth Systems



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About Colonial Park Care Center

Colonial Park Care Center is a 198-bed skilled nursing center, located near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, less than a mile from PinnacleHealth’s Community General Osteopathic Campus. Colonial Park provides skilled nursing care and rehabilitation services to help injured, sick, or disabled individuals get back on their feet. As one of the healthcare providers that arrange for patients to obtain follow-up care at Colonial Park, PinnacleHealth releases patients and transfers them after an acute hospital stay. There, patients receive hands-on care from nurses, physical rehabilitation, or speech therapy until they are able to return home.

In support of IHI’s “Triple Aim” goals to optimize health system performance, and under the leadership of Brett Shibley, NHA, Colonial Park participated in PinnacleHealth’s pilot telehealth program.

About InTouch Health

InTouch Health provides technology-enabled services to healthcare providers for the delivery of high-quality clinical care virtually anywhere, anytime. The InTouch Telehealth Network enables healthcare systems to deploy telehealth applications across their own enterprise, and into other care sites, such as non-affiliated hospitals, rehab centers, long-term care, clinics, and homes. InTouch Health also offers physician services to assist healthcare systems in meeting their telehealth demands, and to address physician shortages.

Why Bring Telehealth to Skilled Nursing Facilities?

As a progressive institution, PinnacleHealth leverages remote technology to achieve cost-effective, patient-centered care. Recognizing that not all technology would help to achieve these goals, leaders at PinnacleHealth performed a “Care Analysis” to determine whether telehealth was a good fit for their system and partners. PinnacleHealth explored three areas of benefit: *Patient Care*, *Hospital Benefits*, and *Skilled Nursing Care Facility Savings*.

Patient Benefits

- Better continuity
- Faster care
- Less disruption
- Reduced costs of care



Hospital Benefits

- Fewer readmissions
- Higher patient satisfaction
- Better ED throughput
- Gap coverage



SNF Benefits

- More timely intervention
- Improved continuity of care
- Fewer transfers back to acute care
- Access to specialist when needed

Why InTouch?

PinnacleHealth selected InTouch Health to enable telehealth services to support their IHI “Triple Aim” goals to reach out into the community. InTouch Health’s best-in-class technology and 24/7 service support met every performance standard, allowing PinnacleHealth to focus on their clinical care goals. Developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the Triple Aim is a framework to optimize health system performance by:

1. Improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction)
2. Improving the health of populations
3. Reducing the per capita cost of health care

Colonial Park Care Center Experience

PinnacleHealth partnered with Colonial Park to create a telehealth program at the facility in October 2013. A single physician with a census of 40 patients was selected to launch the program.

“Telehealth allows our physicians to clinically assess the residents remotely to enhance a greater recovery of good health and well being 24/7.”

—Brett Shibley, NHA
Colonial Park Care Center

As they embarked on a 5-month implementation plan, PinnacleHealth leadership identified the challenges of introducing a new technology, new responsibilities, and new processes to the staff at Colonial Park; understanding that physicians, staff, and even patients could have a difficult time adjusting to the use of technology in this manner. The PinnacleHealth team knew that an already stressed staff might balk at additional training and care protocols. Select staff members were required to take on responsibilities outside of their normal duties, and the nature of telehealth as a hybrid program meant that ownership of the program would require IT, as well as emergency and specialist physicians to support specific patient needs and be successful.

Telehealth is a Cost-Effective Practice Based on Savings Gained From Reduced Readmission:

- FY2013: 23% readmission rate
- FY2014: 17% readmission rate
- 6% decrease with minimal usage in the first fiscal year of operation
- Equated to \$250,000 savings over the utilization of telehealth on only 25 patients

Rather than introducing telehealth into the facility as just another task added to the current process, PinnacleHealth helped physicians and staff to see it as a substitution that would gain better outcomes. Nurses and physicians were encouraged to adopt this new technology as a tool for clear and succinct communication between them, allowing physicians to do a better evaluation on their patients. At Colonial Park, nurses learned to use telehealth as an early warning tool to recognize changes in a patient’s condition. Once they had gathered as much information as possible, the physician would beam into the InTouch Lite device, examine the patient, and make decisions.

Telehealth Program Expansion

What began with a single pioneering physician provider at Colonial Park Care Center will now include more than 25 physician providers across all five locations. The next phase of expansion will bring the InTouch telehealth system to seven more skilled nursing facilities by the end of 2015.

As a leader in the expansion of telehealth into post-acute care facilities, PinnacleHealth leadership is presenting data on their remote presence successes to major health insurance companies who might better manage their high-risk patient populations and further reduce readmissions.

Keys to Success



Physician Champion

PinnacleHealth has determined the need to engage a Physician Champion for each new facility at the outset, helping to educate and ease the transition for nursing staff and other physicians new to telehealth.



User Adoption

Key to success at Colonial Park has been gaining user adoption by providing good data and demonstrating positive impact for all involved. Additionally, the PinnacleHealth team has been proactive in establishing, owning and marketing the telehealth program, resulting in a growing number of physicians and residents expressing interest in, and enthusiasm for, telehealth.



Routine Telehealth

The success of the program has driven PinnacleHealth and Colonial Park Care Center to propose a policy that requires all physicians at that facility to use the InTouch Health system if they have more than a specified number of patients.

Summary of Findings

Accountable care measures require innovative strategic planning to remain financially viable. Use of InTouch Health's advanced telehealth technology can help meet these needs for health systems and their partners by:

1. Controlling costs
2. Preventing readmissions
3. Providing early intervention in patient care areas