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New Research Shows Impact of Telemedicine on Delivery of Healthcare

ATA Annual Meeting Showcases Outstanding Programs and Research

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San Diego, CA – New research regarding the provision of health care using telecommunications will be reported at the American Telemedicine Association’s 11th Annual Meeting, May 7-10, 2006, in San Diego, CA. Approximately 300 peer reviewed presentations will be delivered at the meeting covering many aspects of remote healthcare delivery. Many of the presentations, including the ones highlighted below, provide outcomes of recent research showing how telemedicine has improved care, reduced cost and provided new ways for patients to access healthcare. The presentations highlighted here cover the following areas:

- ❖ Congestive Heart Failure
- ❖ Mental Health
- ❖ Homeless Outreach
- ❖ Diabetes
- ❖ Dermatology
- ❖ Disease Management
- ❖ Asthma
- ❖ Obesity

A complete list of presentations for the meeting is available on the ATA website at <http://www.americantelemed.org/conf/annualmeeting.htm>.

Remote Monitoring of Congestive Heart Failure Patients Leads to Significant Cost Savings

A new study conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) found significant savings in healthcare costs through the use of telemedicine for congestive heart failure (CHF) patients. The study, conducted by the State University of New York, Stony Brook, found that patients using telemedicine to manage their CHF experienced a reduction in overall healthcare costs of 41%, physician office visits by 43%, emergency room visits by 33%, and hospitalizations by 29%. Reduced physician office visits alone offered a savings of more than \$115 million annually. Aging individuals with chronic conditions account for a disproportionate percentage of healthcare costs in the United States. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reports that a condition such as congestive heart failure (CHF) can cost more than \$28 billion annually, including \$270 million for physician visits.

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Remote Mental Health Visits May Be Superior To Face-To-Face Consultations

New research out of Fletcher Allen Health Care in Vermont finds that telemental health is superior to face-to-face consultations in certain cases. Treatment for cases of paranoia or schizoid states, extreme shyness, comorbid nonpsychiatric illness, terminal illness, and some phobias were found to be more effective using a “distance” approach with remote videoconferencing. Additionally, the videoconferencing allowed nurse facilitators, family members, or social workers to be present and improved scheduling coordination with different parties. The use of videoconferencing allows providers to tilt or zoom in to observe specific body parts (eyes, mouth, hands, face) or to watch family’s or others’ responses to consultants questions or remarks without disturbing the patient and /or other parties.

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Remote Medical Services Used to Treat Homeless Patients

A unique program in New York City provides needed medical services to homeless people living in the city. The program uses a mobile medical unit to capture and send digital images of patient's skin and patient histories via the internet to SUNY Downstate Medical Center, where they were diagnosed and used as real-time educational tools for residents. Certain afflictions such as rashes and complicated dermatological conditions disproportionately affect the homeless population, making access to dermatological care critical. The program was launched by Project Renewal and SUNY Downstate Medical Center serving homeless patients in Project Renewal's mobile medical unit (MedVan) in New York City. The program effectively diagnosed and planned treatment for 90% of the cases (40).

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Videophone Consults Can Significantly Help Families with Diabetic Children

A newly released report out of Sacramento, California has found that using videophones to connect health providers to families with diabetic children can reduce costs to healthcare providers while maintaining the quality of care. It was also found that such use can significantly reduce the number of school hours missed by the patient. The study, conducted by Sutter Medical Center in Sacramento, CA, showed how videophone technology helped health care providers communicate with and manage children using insulin pumps spread over 17 California counties. The study's results showed that use of the videophone improved patient compliance and increased cost savings without compromising patient satisfaction and quality of care. The biggest impact was on valuable provider time, where patients missed substantially fewer videophone exams than in-person exams.

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In-Person Visits, Digital Images for Dermatology Yield the Same Outcomes

A significant study just released has found that patients seen by dermatologists in person and those that only had digital images (store and forward) reviewed by the specialist resulted in "equivalent" outcomes. The blinded, randomized study, conducted by Brooke Army medical center in San Antonio, Texas and the VA Medical Center and Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina used over 500 Department of Defense patients in the investigation. Patients subjected to in-person and store and forward consultations had the same proportion of improved, no change and worse outcomes.

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Telemonitoring Results in Reduced Hospitalizations

A significant reduction was achieved in patients re-hospitalized with a heart failure diagnosis through the introduction of remote monitoring into an existing heart failure program according to a new study. The research was conducted by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and South Hills Health System Home Health in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Re-hospitalizations within 30 days at the five targeted hospitals declined and patient/clinician contact was increased despite a decrease in home visits. The heart failure re-hospitalization rate was reduced from 7.4% to 4.5%.

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Home Telemonitoring Effective in Managing Pediatric Asthma Patients

Researchers from the Army Medical Department demonstrated that home telemonitoring of children aged 6-17 afflicted with asthma can significantly improve outcomes over traditional office-based care. A group of “virtual patients” recorded and submitted their vital sign data online to their case managers weekly. These were compared to a control group receiving traditional care. The one-year trial showed that children who accessed care through the web-based case management system had better MDI/S scores, more adherence to keeping a journal of daily asthma symptoms, and a greater increase in asthma knowledge. In sum, the “virtual patients” achieved excellent asthma care, revealing that store-and-forward technology combined with case management can provide an important tool to assist in disease management.

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Treating Obesity for Remote Monitoring

Using remote consultations, monitoring of vital signs and online discussions, new reports on two demonstrations show how telemedicine can effectively help people lose weight and keep the pounds off. The demonstrations were based at the University of California - Davis and the University of Colorado. The California demonstration focused on children and adolescent patients and concluded that children struggling with weight problems embraced the telemedicine weight management services and that telemedicine could help facilitate care to individuals in rural areas lacking access to healthcare. The Colorado demonstration provides a remote option to the university’s traditional weight loss program that provides individuals with access to self-monitoring software programs, web-based reporting, and health professionals from their home.

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