

RE: COVID Summary MEMO Emergency, Hospitalist and Behavioral Health Service Lines

Dear Partner,

Avera has been delivering telehealth services to its rural communities for over 25 years. Currently connected to over 470 clinical sites in 32 states, we are working with partners across the U.S. to prepare for and serve in the COVID-19 Crisis. Avera eCARE offers innovative and specialized care through a range of service lines in the hospital and beyond. Emergency, Pharmacy, ICU, Senior Care, Specialty Clinic, Consult, Hospitalist Behavioral Health, Correction Health, School Health, AveraNow and more. Telehealth is poised as a solution to assist with early patient screening, support isolation protocols, and deliver specialty care to remote areas during this outbreak. We are here to be a resource for our partners and continue to make efforts in responding to COVID-19. There are several examples of how we are leveraging telehealth during the pandemic.

To help support our partner Critical Access Hospitals, we have deployed additional telehealth video endpoints allowing increased access to our telemedicine support services. These services include availability of hospitalist, critical care intensivists, specialty care and respiratory therapy expertise to assist in the delivery of care during the COVID Response. These video endpoints are also being used on a daily basis by the staff at the facility to avoid entering rooms of patients suspected to have COVID. This conserves the site's limited supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). Telemedicine may also become a lifeline in small facilities that have large numbers of staff on home quarantine after an exposure. We are also working with these smaller facilities to provide just-in-time virtual education on high risk intubations, proper PPE, the appropriate airway protocol, and more.

Avera eCARE Emergency:

Specifically, in emergency situations, we use telemedicine to limit the demands placed on rural emergency departments to help reduce the risk of exposure to healthcare staff and patients. Our telemedicine physicians can interview patients and help assess risk and the proper steps to intubate COVID patients and ventilator management. Avera eCARE Emergency can also assist in intubating COVID patients, managing ventilators and walking staff members through the proper airway protocol. The team can also support arranging transfers for patients, providing nursing documentations and limiting the exposure to medical teams.

Our team has been diligently working to help support our partners. With patients becoming more alarmed with the news of COVID continuing to increase, we knew there needed to be a protocol that helped properly triage our patients. We were able to set up a command center within hours and developed a pre-screening tool that was able to route appropriate high level concerns from one facility to another or to properly test those people.

Avera eCARE Hospitalist:

The Avera eCARE COVID-19 Crisis Hospitalist Service offers 24/7 access to Intensivists, RT, Hospitalists and accompanying respiratory therapy and nursing staff to work together with the facilities local team to care for patients. Enhance patient care by supporting both nursing staff and providers. Provide consistent, high quality care within a defined scope of practice. We are managing real-time health status deterioration intervention and collaboration.

Avera has set up Respiratory Clinics throughout the region, which allow patients who are in need of specialty care to come to the different locations and connect with that respiratory specialist. These clinics are set up with the nurse assisting patients and connecting via the TytoCare platform with the provider in the next room. This service has allowed many patients to receive the much needed care through telemedicine, while protecting our physicians from possible exposure.

Avera eCARE Behavioral Health:

The Avera eCare Behavioral Health is responding 24/7 to the increase mental health needs caused by COVID-19 related stressors within emergency departments. Our multidisciplinary behavioral health team integrates with local care delivery team to aid in de-escalation, safety assessment, treatment, discharge planning, and bed placement when necessary. Our psychiatrist also provide admission support along with inpatient support that is reducing the workload of local providers.

COVID 19 Response Results:

To date, we have scaled up 7 program offerings (Hospitalist, Emergency, ICU, RT, Virtual Visits, Senior Care and Pharmacy) and implemented over 100 sites in response to COVID-19. We have deployed nearly 700 equipment devices, which include Polycom, TytoCare units, and iPads that include the appropriate software models already loaded. This has allowed the increase availability of virtual encounters throughout the network and to help ensure patient safety and connectivity during this public health emergency regardless of location. Our telehealth work has been positively impacted by the relaxing of requirements related to our health professional's licensure and credentialing across state lines due to the pandemic crisis. Our project teams are hopeful that some of these mechanisms can remain in place as they allow Avera eCARE to serve more Americans through telehealth, particularly considering limited time and staffing resources.



Brian Skow, MD, FACEP
Avera eCARE Medical Director
