Background

Rural nurse practitioners (NP) fill a desperate need for obstetrical and gynecologic health care in remote areas of Arkansas, often providing care for many counties and traveling from clinic-to-clinic daily. Further, the rural nurse practitioner is often professionally isolated, without the option to call a colleague into a patient’s room for mutual insight and consultation. In 2009, the Arkansas Department of Health (DOH) and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) collaborated to improve resources and support for the rural nurse practitioner, implementing a multi-component, telemedicine-driven program to help dissolve these issues.

Outcomes

In essence, the rural NP is now supported through a variety of telemedicine-based technology, connecting them to a continual stream of specialty support that was once unavailable in their rural settings. As the demand for high-risk services increases, it is essential for health care providers in women’s health and obstetrics to partner in new and innovative ways, and telemedicine is the tool by which these collaborations should be based for any rural-to-urban settings.

Program Components

- Co-managing high-risk women during pregnancy
- Telephone consultation
- Virtual grand rounds
- Specialty care via teleconferencing

Patient benefits

- Decreased travel and time burden
- Decreased need for additional consult visits
- Decreased financial costs
- Decreased time off work, lost wages
- Decreased psychological burden
- Reduced anxiety related to high-risk cases
- Increased sense of care consolidation
- Decreased “fragmentation” of care
- Increased compliance?
- Potential improvement in prenatal outcomes?

APN benefits

- Open system vs. closed system
- Informal educational experience
- Allows APN to discuss case with OB/GYN faculty
- Decreased APN anxiety related to high-risk cases
- Decreased sense of isolation
- Increased sense of connection to consultation/advice

Health care system benefits

- Extends reach of high-risk perinatal services to underserved areas of Arkansas
- Maximizes time/effort of OB/GYN faculty
- Increases utility and cost-effectiveness of advanced practice nurses by allowing them to continue care of high-risk maternity cases

Testimonial

“...Since I have been with the Arkansas Department of Health, I have had numerous high-risk patients that local providers are unwilling to accept into their...practices. Thankfully, these patients are able to stay in their local community to receive care, because I have the ability to do a phone consult or now schedule with telemedicine in our clinic...”