

The Business Case for Centralized Monitoring

Clinical and financial ROI at Ochsner Health Using the TeleSitter® solution

Historically, health systems and hospitals have used "patient sitters" to provide one-on-one monitoring support for patients. This approach, however, is costly and inefficient. Virtual sitters that can monitor multiple patients simultaneously have become one of the fastest growing trends in virtual care.

With value-based care, adverse events like patient falls and elopements are no longer reimbursable and the penalties for medical mistakes are growing. Staffing shortages also make it challenging to find patient sitters.

As a result, many healthcare organizations are expanding their TeleSitter programs. To learn more about this trend and the associated clinical and financial benefits, Becker's Hospital Review spoke with AvaSure's chief clinical innovation officer and two telemedicine leaders from New Orleans-based Ochsner Health:

- Jennifer Humbert, MSN, RN, Assistant Vice President of Telemedicine at Ochsner Health
- Rachelle Longo, MHA, BSN, RN, Assistant Vice President of Telemedicine Strategic Partnership Solutions at Ochsner Health
- Lisbeth Votruba, MSN, RN, Chief Clinical Innovation Officer at AvaSure

Hub and spoke TeleSitter models are becoming the norm for health systems

With a hub and spoke model, dedicated monitoring staff work from a remote "hub" with one or more large observation stations. Each staff member uses room devices to watch between 12 and 16 patients that may be in various facilities or "spokes" across a metropolitan area, state or region. This enables one trained staff member to proactively keep multiple patients safe.

AvaSure's room devices provide 360-degree cameras with pan, tilt and zoom capabilities, as well as high-fidelity audio. Video and audio technology enables monitors to see, evaluate and communicate with individual patients.

"Nurses often select patients for monitoring if they are higher risk for falls or elopement, likely to wander out of the hospital, a low-to-moderate suicide risk or likely to harm staff members," Ms. Votruba said. "The remote monitor staff really become part of the care team and engage with patients."

At Ochsner Health, the TeleSitter program improves patient safety and the quality of care

When Ochsner Health developed its TeleSitter business model, it also turned to the centralized hub and spoke model. The organization started its telehealth footprint in 2009 with telestroke and then in 2014, it deployed an eICU model for critical care centralized monitoring. That quickly evolved in 2016 to an expanded TeleSitting program.

"Ochsner Health uses TeleSitting at 17 facilities and we have 108 devices deployed to support 24/7 operations," Ms. Humbert said. "Our digital healthcare technicians monitor with a one-to-twelve ratio."

The success of Ochsner Health's TeleSitting program is due, in part, to the way the organization rolled out the initiative. The telemedicine team focuses on product design and implementation of operations in the hub, while the telemedicine strategic partnership solutions team focuses on the services provided to the spokes.

"Change management is important for both the hub and spokes," Ms. Longo said. "We like to go to each facility and identify what they are currently doing to prevent patient falls. The staff then takes those processes and evolves them into the TeleSitter program. This gives teams a sense of ownership over the change."

Although research has shown that one-to-one sitter staffing is less effective than using remote safety monitoring for at-risk patients, front-line nurses aren't always on board with TeleSitter program initiatives. This presents additional opportunities for change management work.

"Sometimes dependable, in-room sitting resources just aren't available. Providing reliable, remote resources solves a pain point for care teams," Ms. Humbert said. "With the TeleSitter program we can be the reliable resource. Our remote monitor staff have ongoing relationships with the sites and participate in post-fall huddles. We aren't just replacing a warm body with a camera. We're replacing in-room sitters in a way that improves outcomes and quality."

The effectiveness of continuous remote safety monitoring is clear. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, a patient with an elevated risk for falls was admitted to Ochsner Health for 30 days. Although the patient had near-fall events at least two to three times per day, the patient never fell and remained safe throughout the month-long stay.



Cross-functional collaboration contributes to TeleSitter program success

At Ochsner Health, the telemedicine team and IT worked together closely to make technology decisions that would support an effective TeleSitter program. "We looked at our problem statement and the voice of the customer information to identify pain points for patients and providers," Ms. Humbert said. "We and the IT team aligned around patient first. We designed up front for that and then backed into the technology."

The Ochsner team also examined the talent acquisition and development implications of the TeleSitter program. Ms. Humbert observed that some organizations simply take their room sitters, put them in a bunker and expect success from their TeleSitter program. That approach usually doesn't work.

Monitor staff must be comfortable handling a larger patient load and working with technology. "We need people with a critical thinking mindset," Ms. Humbert explained. "As a result, we've changed our staffing model. Our job descriptions now call for digital healthcare technicians. These are the individuals that represent the voice of the customer. They will help us optimize what we're doing virtually and continue to innovate."

Digital healthcare technicians are entry-level positions which Ochsner employees can use as steppingstones to long-term careers in healthcare. Ms. Longo commented that this approach is consistent with other initiatives across the Ochsner Health system that are designed to develop employees.

A TeleSitter model delivers a clear ROI to healthcare organizations, while supporting revenue-generating opportunities

AvaSure estimates its technology-based TeleSitter solutions are significantly less expensive than in-room patient sitters, costing less than \$3 per patient monitoring hour. Ochsner Health's experience has been consistent with these findings. Thanks to its TeleSitter program, the organization has seen a significant reduction in patient sitter costs.

90 to 108 patients a day monitored by eight or nine technicians



"We average anywhere from 90 to 108 patients a day monitored by eight or nine technicians instead of using 90 to 108 individual sitters across the 17 hospitals," Humbert explained.

"If you think about it, small hospitals may only have one or two devices while larger hospitals have 15. But even if you are only using one device, it's still one-twelfth the cost of a one-to-one sitter. It becomes a very easy pitch to some of our partner sites because the ROI is so clear. From our perspective, internally within the system, we see about a 90 percent cost reduction when we effectively use the TeleSitter solution," said Longo.

Cost avoidance also strengthens the return on investment of the TeleSitter solution. One fall can cost \$1,500 and a fall with an injury can cost much more. Ochsner Health benchmarks both system and TeleSitter fall rates. According to Ms. Humbert, the fall rate while using the TeleSitter solution is almost nonexistent compared to the system fall rate, which is a clear indication of a good ROI.

Continuous remote safety monitoring is an innovative approach that delivers support to staff and patients

AvaSure reports that fall prevention is often the reason hospitals initially implement the TeleSitter solution, since 60 percent of total patients are monitored for falls. Organizations soon discover, however, that the solution can be used in many other ways to improve patient and staff wellbeing.

For a time during the pandemic, New Orleans was the center of COVID-19 cases in Louisiana. Ochsner Health had some facilities with no patient volume, while others were overwhelmed. By leveraging its TeleSitter program, the organization was able to load balance staffing, while reducing exposure risks for staff and conserving personal protective equipment.

"Many times, we put patients on camera to watch for respiratory distress, rather than for falls," Ms. Humbert explained. "If the remote monitor staff saw signs of respiratory distress, they escalated to the rapid response teams and called the bedside teams if intervention was needed."

Remote safety monitoring can also play an important role in workplace violence prevention. "As a nurse, I implore you to think about the ways you can use technology for staff safety. In emergency department settings, for instance, patients may be impulsive and volatile due to substance abuse withdrawal or other reasons," Ms. Votruba said. In these scenarios, monitor staff can ensure patient and employee safety by monitoring individuals remotely and summoning help quickly when needed.

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Conclusion

Looking ahead, Ochsner Health believes its TeleSitter program will play a central role in providing a consistent virtual experience for patients. For example, the organization sees the potential to integrate its TeleSitter program capabilities with other centralized services.

"We have multiple services in our bunker and we're looking at ways to create synergy between the staff and staffing models for TeleSitting, telemetry units, virtual assessment and virtual triage," Ms. Humbert said. "The goal is to create those synergies while maintaining high reliability, expertise, quality and safety."

AvaSure stands ready to help healthcare organizations leverage inpatient telehealth to achieve strategic goals. AvaSure pioneered its TeleSitter® solution in 2008 as a fall-prevention tool, and it has since become a standard for patient care, placed in all top 10 U.S. health systems as well as 826 hospitals across 48 states and Canada. By continuing to reduce adverse events, and by optimizing workforce efficiencies, AvaSure has consistently lowered the cost of care while providing safer, more efficient healthcare for everyone. AvaSure telehealth products and solutions are manufactured and assembled in the United States at AvaSure's headquarters in Belmont, Michigan.

For more information, please visit www.avasure.com.



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