

Wyoming Telehealth Network

April Provider Spotlight

Vivian Swallow



It's no question that Vivian Swallow, BA, has been making a deep impact in her community throughout her career. Helping to implement a telehealth program in Lame Deer, Montana, is just one of her many accomplishments. Currently, Vivian is the care coordinator in Arapahoe, Wyoming, at the Wind River Family and Community Health Care. The mission of the clinic is to provide primary care, traditional healing, preventative care, and wellness promotion to all members of the community as intended by the Creator. Vivian is also an engaged and active member of the Wyoming Telehealth Network, and is passionate about improving health outcomes through telehealth.

1. When did you first hear about telehealth? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?

Vivian Swallow: I first heard/saw telehealth in action while visiting family in Northern Sweden in April 1996. The histologist used store and forward images of gram stains; the images were sent to Stockholm for review by the pathologist. This was very intriguing and an excellent alternative to sending the slides to Stockholm for review. Needless to say I was impressed. I continue to marvel at the possibilities in telehealth. COVID accelerated the use of telehealth globally; it will be interesting to see how the pandemic telehealth transformation will shape the future of medicine in the future.

2. When did you begin offering telehealth services? What prompted the need to offer these services?

Vivian: I am not a "provider" however, as an administrator in rural Montana it was clear how telehealth could improve health outcomes and continuity of care. In Lame Deer, MT —123 miles from Billings, MT our clinic decided to contract services for the 24-hour urgent care with Avera-Sioux Fall, SD. This partnership reduced the number of ambulance and air flights to Billings and empowered our staff to care for patients. The Urgent Care providers have learned advanced care and treatments from the Avera Emergency Department Physicians.

We were prompted by the lack of local access to OB services. Women would present to the Urgent Care fully dilated; without an OB/GYN provider on staff the urgent care providers often would deliver babies in high risk situations.

3. What motivates you to continue offering telehealth services?

Vivian: Our patients often do not have the means to travel, lack transportation or do not have family support to travel for care in the "Big Cities". Patients travel through winter storms on shoestring budgets to spend 10 to 15 minutes with the provider for a follow-up visit. Patients at times do not follow-up with providers which impacts the health outcome and quality of care. Telehealth is a way to bring specialists to our patients.

4. What is your proudest accomplishment with telehealth?

Vivian: Partnership with Avera to bring quality emergency care to Lame Deer, MT.

5. What advice would you give patients wanting to try telehealth?

Vivian: Telehealth saves time and money without sacrificing quality care.

6. What advice would you give providers wanting to start offering telehealth?

Vivian: Telehealth is an affordable healthcare delivery method. Providing patient education about the platforms, making certain the patient can access the platform and other education is vital to successful telehealth visits.

7. What was the biggest barrier in providing telehealth services? Have you overcome it?

Vivian: Our clinic offers telephone telemedicine with our patients locally. The clinic has purchased state of the art equipment but has not established contracts, telehealth agreements or Coordination of Care Agreements (COCA) with specialists out of the area. Our patients must travel to see an out of town specialist. The clinic must write the contracts, agreement and COCA.

8. How do you think implementing telehealth now will affect how things will be done at your organization after the pandemic is over?

Vivian: Our CEO would like to continue telephone telehealth for our patients. Increasing telehealth to include specialists would be awesome for our patients! The outcomes would include increased quality and care continuity (for follow-up visits).

9. Is there anything you learned the hard way in telehealth implementation?

Vivian: Telehealth is not for everyone. Many providers prefer hands on rather than observing patients from a monitor or telephone.

10. Do you have any telehealth hacks or tricks?

Vivian: Do not give up!!! Purchasing high tech gadgets are only useful if you use them.

Bonus Question: Do you have a favorite podcast, book, or author?

Vivian: Agatha Christie has always been my favorite author. She was a very clever lady!