Telehealth: Defining Program Goals

Once you’ve selected a vendor and are ready to implement a telehealth program, you must first define your program model, as well as your goals and objectives.

Your business model and demographic will drive your program model. The duration for which patients are monitored will either be a short-term (post-acute discharge) or long-term (chronic disease management) model. The conditions for which telehealth is often used include congestive heart failure (CHF), diabetes, hypertension and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. If, for example, your agency focuses on patients diagnosed with CHF who have been discharged from the hospital and referred for home health, then the duration of monitoring would be a single episode of care (1 cert. period). Once your model is defined, the next step is to define goals and objectives for your telehealth program. Developing a telehealth program based on clear goals and objectives allows for the highest level of success in meeting the organization’s and patients’ needs.

Homecare agencies continuously focus on improving the clinical and financial outcomes of their organization. Telehealth can help. Common goals of a telehealth program may include:

- Improving clinical outcomes by decreasing the number of readmissions
- Decreasing the average cost per episode by decreasing the number of unnecessary nursing visits
- Increasing the number of referral sources by marketing your program to area hospitals, insurance providers, and physicians

Identifying quantifiable goals is critical. Document where you are now and where you want to be in the next three, six, and nine months. For example, if your readmission rate is currently 41%, identify a realistic goal rate following implementation of telehealth on all high-risk patients for six months?

Questions to consider:

- How will you measure progress toward your goals?
- Who will document the necessary data points?
- Who will generate and review the reports to determine if your goals are met?

Consider these questions for each of your goals. With these details defined, document them in your organization’s standard policies and procedures.

It’s critical to the success of your telehealth program to communicate the goals of your program to your entire staff. Be sure to outline how each staff member will be asked to contribute toward the goals and how they will be measured against them. Clearly communicate any new expectations, as well as changes in responsibilities and processes. Be sure to highlight the positive impact on the patients, staff, and overall organization. Our collective goal is to improve the lives of those we serve; telehealth can help us do that!

If you have any questions, please call Philips Telehealth Solutions at (800) 422-0768 or visit www.philips.com/telehealth.