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## Grant makes home care easier

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A grant to expand a telemedicine program could allow for more people in the region to have symptoms of their chronic disease monitored from home.

The Greater Rochester Health Foundation awarded a two-year grant of up to \$490,355 to Visiting Nurse Service of Rochester and Monroe County. The home health care agency is expected to help Finger Lakes Visiting Nurse Service of Geneva, a separate corporate entity, develop a telemedicine program for its home care patients. Additionally, VNS will partner with MVP Health Care and the Anthony L. Jordan Health Center to help eligible patients stay on top of their condition.

"We think this will help them manage their chronic disease," said Kat Bassney, director of development for VNS. "It will help the region in terms of reducing hospitalizations and emergency room visits that aren't necessary if we have preventive services in their home."

The grant is projected to serve 1,575 additional people. VNS currently has 100 telemedicine units in use at any one time. Over the course of a year, VNS can serve up to 750 people.

There are other types of telemedicine programs in the area. While they may work differently, the premise is the same.

Telemedicine provides a way for health professionals to keep an eye on patients' vital signs without having to see them in person. Equipment such as blood pressure or glucose monitors are connected to a phone and patients take readings or answer questions daily. The information is transmitted to a nurse and, depending on the data or response, can trigger a phone call to further assess the situation.

"Many of the people in home care are alone or with family members," Bassney said. "They're afraid of how they're feeling. They need assurance, knowing someone is looking at them every day."

Telemedicine services are credited with reducing the need for costly emergency room services or hospitalizations. Bassney said that currently, hospitalizations for VNS patients using telemedicine have been reduced 50 percent compared to other patients with the same diagnosis.

Patients with heart disease, diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease — conditions which have a high risk of hospital readmission — are among those using telemedicine.

By including MVP and Jordan, the grant will allow VNS to study the effectiveness of telemedicine on patients who are not enrolled in home care. It also coordinates care to reduce duplication of services.

The money came from the foundation's Opportunity Grant program, in which organizations identify the most pressing needs of their clientele and propose a solution that focuses on either prevention efforts or health care delivery. Proposals are reviewed by an external panel and scored according to factors that include the number of people affected by the program.

The foundation estimated that the two-year project could save more than \$3 million.

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