

Hospital Telepharmacy Network: Delivering Pharmacy Services to Rural Hospitals

CHARLES D PETERSON, ANN RATHKE, JOHN SKWIERA, AND
HOWARD C ANDERSON JR

Objective: To provide a detailed description of the Hospital Telepharmacy Network established in North Dakota for delivering pharmacy services to rural hospitals, including its overall purpose, goals, and how it works; and to provide valuable information for pharmacists and rural hospitals on how to successfully implement a telepharmacy program designed to serve small rural hospitals that do not have 24 hour pharmacist staffing and pharmacy services.

Discussion: Seven rural hospitals (4 acute care, 3 critical access) in northern and central frontier counties of North Dakota that established a hospital telepharmacy network for delivering pharmacist staffing and pharmacy services between the institutions are described. Through use of audio, video, and computer links, rural hospitals in Rugby, Devils Lake, Harvey, Rolla, Carrington, Mandan, and Cando with an average of 32 beds (range 20–50), 11,214 doses filled per month (range 7,000–23,000), 1 staff pharmacist, and 1 pharmacy technician participated in the project. Hours of service for the pharmacies are Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (3 hospitals), 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (1 hospital), 8:30 am to 4:30 pm (2 hospitals), and 8:30 am to 5:00 pm (1 hospital).

Conclusions: National pharmacist shortages have made it difficult for small rural hospitals to find pharmacist relief help in covering routine hours, evenings, nights, weekends, vacations, sick time, and professional meetings. The Hospital Telepharmacy Network in North Dakota provides a convenient and affordable solution for rural hospitals to meet their pharmacist staffing needs. It also provides a mechanism for rural hospitals to satisfy the new Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' requirement of pharmacy being accessed after hours by only pharmacy personnel and provides future strategies for hospitals to address the issue of 24 hour pharmacist review of all medication orders.

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CHARLES D PETERSON PharmD, Professor and Dean, College of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Allied Sciences, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND; **ANN RATHKE MS MEd**, Telepharmacy Coordinator, College of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Allied Sciences, North Dakota State University; **JOHN SKWIERA BS Pharm**, Director of Pharmacy, Heart of America Medical Center, Rugby, ND; and **HOWARD C ANDERSON JR BS Pharm**, Executive Director, North Dakota State Board of Pharmacy, Bismarck, ND.

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