



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Secure messaging opens new paths to health care providers

By: Stacy Neumann, Medical Department Activity Public Affairs

It's no secret. Most people will avoid a trip to the hospital if it's possible. A new system coming to Fort Carson's Medical Department Activity could help some people do just that.

Secure messaging arrives at the Patient-Centered Medical Homes early this summer. "It's a new gateway for patients to access medical care when it is convenient for them," said Aisha Dailey, head nurse at Robinson Medicine Clinic. "It empowers the patient access to medical information when they need it."

Secure messaging, powered by RelayHealth, is a web-based tool that allows beneficiaries and primary care providers to directly message one another. Fort Carson-MEDDAC is one of the pilot sites for the Army. Nurses will have the ability to send messages with normal lab results, reminders about appointments or well-care visits, follow up on visits, and let people know that refill prescriptions are ready for pick up. Patients can ask questions, request refills, or search through the site's patient education library. For many, it will mean avoiding repeat trips to the hospital or wait times for prescription refills.

Eric Everard, Clinical Informatics Chief, is working on implementing the system at MEDDAC. He says it has tangible benefits for both medical staff and beneficiaries.

"You have the ability to send a message that will be tracked, read and replied to. You can't always get that with a phone message. It's concrete. It's credible. There's confirmation for both sides," he explained.

Dailey said these types of systems tend to improve patient satisfaction and improve access to care. In a study at Robinson, Dailey found an average telephone consult to discuss a normal laboratory result took 10 minutes. With more than 200 of these per month, the clinic was losing the ability to make 26 additional in-person appointments. The web-based system allows caregivers to get that time back while maintaining 24 hour availability for those with non-urgent communication requirements.

"It's about an integrated effort, working together to meet the patient's need. We are available to them when they need us," Dailey said.



Col. Nick Piantanida, Chief of Primary Care, added, "Secure messaging has an unique opportunity to expand the patient-provider relationship in an environment that is centered on the patient's desire for medical information and improved health. I challenge our patients to surpass all expectations in applying secure messaging to find renewed interest in participating in this extraordinary extension of your health care."

Finally, health care providers will be able to send out broadcast messages about potential appointment cancellations during bad weather or remind beneficiaries about things like upcoming flu clinics.

Secure messaging is a HIPAA compliant communications tools and beneficiaries should know that their health information is secure and safe.

The secure messaging system is not for making appointments or getting referrals. Beneficiaries can make appointments anytime online through www.tricareonline.com.

The patient-centered medical homes have already begun compiling email addresses for this service during patient visits. When the system is activated, participants will be asked to respond to an invite email.