



## Rural OB/GYN

High risk pregnancies are particularly concerning and often require the intervention of a maternal-fetal specialist to make sure the pregnancy is successful. When high risk pregnancies happen in rural areas, they can be especially challenging. Keeping appointments with a specialist can be complicated by travel distances, bad weather and the condition of the mother.

During a routine pre-natal visit to an OB/GYN in Norfolk, NE, an expectant mother was told she had a high risk pregnancy and would need to consult with a maternal-fetal specialist located in another city over a hundred miles away. However, her doctor quickly delivered the good news that his office was set up to do consults via telemedicine.

“One advantage of a telemedicine program are that patients are spending less money on traveling and taking less time off work. Some of the patients need to be seen weekly so this can be a huge benefit.” Nora Petersen, RT, RDMS, Ultrasound Tech

This is a fairly common occurrence at Midwest Health Partners in Norfolk which includes a very robust OB/GYN practice as part of its' healthcare services. In this case, a sonogram of the baby was transmitted in real-time to the maternal-fetal specialist and a face-to-face consultation was done over a secure, encrypted network via teleconsultation.

A teleconsultation, or teleconsult, allows a patient to experience a "virtual visit" with their specialist from their local physicians office and avoid the time, expense and inconvenience of travel to a distant location for an in-office visit. If appropriate, data like lab reports and images like sonograms or radiology studies can be also shared with the specialist instantaneously from the local physician. Teleconsults do not replace all face-to-face visits but serve as a great option to patients for things like treatment follow ups, care plan changes, medication adjustments and second opinions.

A recent high risk pregnancy mother is a big fan of the teleconsults. "It's great!" she said "you want to get the best care available but when you live in a rural area, it puts a lot of added burden and stress on you to travel for appointments. Having the ability to see my specialist without having to travel all the time is a blessing."

Midwest Health Partners utilizes telemedicine technology provided by AET LLC, a Norfolk, NE based company specializing in technology integration and new healthcare delivery models. AET facilitates the teleconsults through a HIPAA secure, cloud-based video/data sharing platform called the CPI Exchange (Consolidated Patient Information Exchange).

The CPI Exchange platform is easy to use and provides the flexibility needed for Midwest Health Partners to expand the usage to other areas of their practice as well. For example, they also conduct virtual pre-natal classes for their expectant mothers and act as an originating site for a variety of other distant specialists who have patients in the Norfolk area.

AET's Customer Service Center (CSC) oversees each teleconsult. They add a "personal touch" component to educate physicians, staff and patients about the process. AET also maintains a partnership with over 30 independent specialists of different disciplines who are already equipped, trained and ready to conduct teleconsults through the AET platform.

If a patient requires a specialist outside of the AET partnership, AET personnel will contact the specialist to offer their services to facilitate the teleconsult. From that point, the specialist schedules the appointment into their daily workflow identified as a "teleconsult". Prior to the appointment, the video room link is emailed to both the specialist and the originating office. When it's time for the

appointment, each party simply clicks on the provided link and they are joined together in a virtual room. The process is made even simpler by the fact that most of the teleconsults do not require special or dedicated equipment. The specialist can conduct the teleconsult through their desktop or laptop computer and even their smart phone if necessary.

“I’ve been using telemedicine for over ten years and it has improved my ability to care for patients who live in rural areas. It allows direct interaction with the patient without the need for the patient to travel to a larger town nor do I need to go to outreach in the traditional sense, which results in poor use of time particularly support staff.” Dr. Michael Barsoom, MD, Maternal-Fetal Specialist

As the demand for healthcare services continues to increase and the clinical and financial resources lag behind, new healthcare delivery models must be embraced. Midwest Health Partners has embraced telemedicine technology to providing a convenient, cost saving access option to the top quality specialist care that patients demand.