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St. Anthony Hospital Expands Its Telemedicine Program With Telepsychiatry

St. Anthony Hospital's newly launched telepsychiatry program provides eight rural Oklahoma hospitals with needed access to a child and adolescent psychiatrist and aims to improve psychiatric services across the state. St. Anthony's telepsychiatry program is an expansion of their existing telemedicine program, the largest in the state, which has been used for radiology, cardiology, endocrinology, and dermatology for the past 4 years.

Oklahoma City, OK – St. Anthony Hospital is excited to announce the launch of the newest component of its existing telemedicine program- telepsychiatry. St. Anthony is an Oklahoma City area hospital within the regional SSM Health Care of Oklahoma network. St. Anthony has a large network of affiliate health centers that shares its services with an even wider network of hospitals, Critical Access Centers and primary care centers across several states. As a forward-thinking organization looking to constantly improve patient care, St. Anthony recognized telemedicine as a solution for increasing access to needed specialists and physicians within their network of sites, many of which are in rural and underserved areas.

Rather than travel between multiple rural facilities, telemedicine allows physicians, including St. Anthony's newest telepsychiatrist, Dr. Rebecca Siegel, MD, to transition seamlessly between its 8 participating sites, thus saving time that might otherwise be spent traveling between appointments.

St. Anthony's telepsychiatry program will largely be used for children and adolescent psychiatric care. Because of the option to utilize remote providers, telemedicine represents unprecedented access to specialists like child and adolescent psychiatrists who are difficult to have on staff in rural and underserved areas. A striking 96% of US counties have a shortage of psychiatric prescribers, but by leveraging technology, existing psychiatric prescribers and specialists are able to extend their reach into rural areas like those served by St. Anthony in Oklahoma.

Dr. Siegel, the telepsychiatrist serving St. Anthony's eight hospitals, works for InSight Telepsychiatry, the leading national telepsychiatry service provider. Dr. Siegel has gone through a rigorous vetting and orientation process and has worked to learn the team, procedures and protocols at each of the St. Anthony sites that she serves. The goal of this orientation was to integrate Dr. Siegel into the onsite care teams and facilitate a long-term working relationship just as if she were an in-person physician.

Effective health care requires collaboration and communication across patients, providers, caregivers and administration. This new telepsychiatry program will allow St. Anthony's providers, patients and families to collaborate with Dr. Siegel while remaining at their local facilities. "Keeping health care local is an integral component of a strong, healthy and cost-conscious community," notes Dr. Robert Rader,

medical director for clinical integration at St. Anthony. “Being able to meet the patients where they are vastly improves care.”

The need for care in rural Oklahoma is immense, with few specialty health care providers available for a population spread out over many miles. A recent report by the United Health Foundation listed Oklahoma as one of the unhealthiest states in the nation, ranked 48th based on measures of health outcomes, disease rates and access to care. Many residents of the state live more than four hours away from a metro area and have extremely limited access to specialty services and in some cases, even primary care. The telepsychiatry program is just one component of St. Anthony’s plan to improve Oklahoma’s health status by addressing high priority needs in behavioral health, substance use, heart disease, obesity and co-occurring disorders.

“We recognized an acute need,” said Dr. Rader. “We had already implemented successful telemedicine programs that improved access to specialty services throughout our network so adding in behavioral health was a logical next step. InSight is the leader in the field of telepsychiatry so they were able to increase St. Anthony’s access to excellent psychiatric specialists like Dr. Siegel.”

St. Anthony is the largest telemedicine provider in Oklahoma, and each of its 13 hospitals have telemedicine rooms equipped with videoconferencing equipment. To date, St. Anthony’s telemedicine program has centered on teleradiology, telecardiology, tele-endocrinology and teledermatology services offered by its own providers.

“Telepsychiatry, particularly when utilized across multiple facilities, eliminates barriers to timely, effective psychiatric care,” says, James Varrell, MD, Medical Director of InSight Telepsychiatry, “We are pleased to work with St. Anthony on improving behavioral health care in Oklahoma.”

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