

## **AveraNow**

### **Avera Health – Sioux Falls, SD**

#### **Background**

Since establishing telemedicine services at Avera Health in 1993, the health system has expanded from eConsult to include the nation's broadest range of eHealth offerings available from a single source. The breadth and quality of this activity reflects Avera's bold intent to put key resources behind innovative thinking. Through a simple, open process, they find ways to harness the creativity already happening within the organization and network of partners. To expand its services from business-to-business to direct-to-consumer offerings, Avera is partnering with American Well, the largest national telehealth company, which developed the most downloaded telehealth app of 2014.

#### **Program Overview**

In June 2015, Avera Health launched a mobile video visit that can be done over a smartphone, tablet or computer. AveraNow is offered by Avera as part of its growing direct-to-consumer, easy access points of care. Appointments are \$49, payable by debit or credit card and are available to all consumers in Avera's service area. The service is available 24/7 for patients as young as age 2 into adulthood.

AveraNow's free mobile app is offered through the iTunes App Store, Google Play and other Android-based app distributors. Or, consumers can connect by logging onto a special web page at [Avera.org/Now](http://Avera.org/Now). When consumers connect for a visit, they can fill out a checklist concerning symptoms, current medications and pertinent health history. AveraNow is appropriate for minor illnesses such as colds, flu, bronchitis, allergy problems, rashes, urinary tract infections and sore throat. Most appointments last about 10 minutes.

Patients get a real-time, two-way video visit with an Avera doctor or advanced practice provider. Some online health services treat patients without actually "seeing" them, based on their questionnaire and a phone conversation. Two-way video enhances the experience and provides better, safer care. Providers review medical histories, answer questions, make diagnoses and prescribe medications, excluding controlled substances. If a visit is not appropriate for AveraNow, for example, anything requiring lab tests, X-rays or hands-on care, consumers are advised to go to primary care, urgent care or an emergency department for their care.

In December 2015, the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) awarded Accreditation for Online Patient Consultations to Avera for the AveraNow service. The ATA accreditation program recognizes U.S. health care entities providing real-time, online consultations directly to the patient that meet specific standards. Designed by experts in the field, ATA's Accreditation Program for Online Patient Consultations has been developed to establish standard criteria regarding the security of patient information, transparency in pricing and operations, qualifications and licensing of providers and clinical practices and guidelines.

**Impact**

Since launching AveraNow in June 2015, Avera has seen encouraging results, with both enrollments and visits climbing month-by-month. The initial cost savings have also been positive, with an estimated initial net savings of \$48 per visit. As AveraNow grows, Avera expects to see further cost savings, particularly as the platform evolves to support additional use cases beyond urgent care.

**Lessons Learned**

Avera was cautious in entering the direct-to-consumer telemedicine market. Virtual visits had to provide an excellent patient experience, be embraced by the medical community, and have value for payers. Particular attention was given to choosing the right technology vendor, laying out a strong marketing plan, and engaging clinician leaders early and often. A primary care medical director was chosen to design a program that would promote high-quality and safe online care, use Avera's own medical group, and meet accreditation requirements. Early wins with the medical group on antibiotic safety and quality assurance reviews have built a broad base of support for future clinical use cases.

**Future Goals**

Avera has already expanded AveraNow into retail locations through a partnership with the local Hy-Vee grocery stores by using American Well kiosks. Additional expansion goals include adding new clinical use cases for Employee Assistance Services and Coordinated Care. Avera plans to use the direct-to-consumer telemedicine platform for much more than urgent care services, and support clinicians in adoption of new ways to work effectively with their patient base.

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