LVHN TeleBurn^{SM} Program

Lehigh Valley Health Network – Allentown, PA

Background

The need for quick assessment provided by burn experts from Lehigh Valley Health Network's (LVHN's) Regional Burn Center (RBC) for providers administering care at sites distant from the Burn Center motivated the technological innovation that is LVHN TeleBurn^{SM}. LVHN's RBC is Pennsylvania's largest and busiest burn center. Working with more than 100 referring facilities, the RBC provides care for more than 700 burn patients every year across four states. The RBC provides treatment for burns or skin-related diseases that require inpatient physiologic monitoring or surgical intervention. Its inpatient team members are experts in treating all degrees and sizes of burn injuries, including those from chemical, electrical and radiological sources.

Overview

Through TeleBurn, emergency departments, urgent care facilities, physician practices and industrial facilities collaborating with the RBC can send photos of a patient's burn injury through a secure system. Burn surgeons from the RBC then review the photos and speak to the physicians at the outlying facilities. Through these assessments, decisions are made about whether care can occur in a patient's home community, or if the patient's injury requires care at the RBC. Launched in December 2008, LVHN's TeleBurn program uses digital cameras, desktop computers, and mobile hand-held devices to provide emergency assessments for burn patients in more than 100 facilities in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Delaware. This geographic area requires a Burn Center Team prepared to meet the needs of patients' diverse backgrounds that go beyond race and ethnicity and are respectful of religious and cultural belief systems.

Impact

Through June 2016, the program has provided assessments for nearly 6,000 patients (5,941). Of those patients, 32 percent were transferred and admitted to the RBC, 31 percent were seen in LVHN's Burn Recovery Center on an outpatient basis, 20 percent remained in their home communities for further treatment, and 17 percent fell into an "other" category (e.g., did not keep an appointment, went elsewhere, etc.). TeleBurn improves patient safety, increases access to care, enhances the quality of care provided, lowers cost and helps keep people in their communities, if they do not require the expertise of the LVHN RBC. LVHN TeleBurn meets the triple aim of providing better care, better health and lowering costs.

LVHN's culturally appropriate care has resulted in a growing relationship with members of the Plain Community (Amish and Mennonite) in Pennsylvania. By respecting their healing practices in treating one of their severely burned children in Virginia and Plain Community patients from New York, Ohio, and Michigan, the RBC team works more closely with WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital and Parochial Medical Center, where many of the Plain Community receive care. The team now integrates healing practices – an ointment made primarily of honey – together with state-of-the-art standards of care when treating these members.

Lessons Learned
Along with rapidly changing technology, such as transitioning from laptops for on-call physicians to using mobile, hand-held devices, program leaders cannot lose sight of the diverse populations being served by initial contact through connected care. Caring for members of the Plain Community is but one example that has informed the culturally responsive care of the LVHN Burn Center team. By understanding personal belief systems, caregivers respect and address cultural views of others when providing a plan of care, in order to fully engage patients and develop trust.

Future Goals
Program leaders plan to create remote and affiliated burn locations for follow-up care, and continue to develop trusting relationships with the diverse communities being served by LVHN's connected care services, including TeleBurn.

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September 2016