



Telehealth to transform patient care behind bars

Partnership with SCDC to increase safety, reduce costs for taxpayers

Charleston, S.C. (July 5, 2016) – The South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) and Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Health are partnering to provide telehealth services to patients behind bars. The parties have signed an agreement that will provide access to health care for incarcerated patients via telehealth services that will be available in four institutions throughout South Carolina, including Kirkland Reception and Evaluation, Evans Correctional Institution, Turbeville Correctional Institution, and Lee Correctional Institution.

The partnership is part of an emerging national trend to provide better care to underserved populations. According to a 2014 report from The PEW Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, per-inmate spending on prison health care grew by a median of 10 percent from 2007-2011. South Carolina spent \$2,933 per inmate in 2011. The use of technology allows the department of corrections to apply clinical resources more effectively while providing quality health care and ensuring public safety by decreasing the number of trips to outside providers.

“Utilizing telehealth services allows the agency to provide care to offenders while offsetting the cost to taxpayers with fewer trips to outside providers,” said Bryan P. Stirling, Corrections director. “This initiative promotes public safety by limiting offender transports outside of prisons.”

A focus on primary care via telehealth services allows SCDC to provide better care and greater access to higher acuity level patients. Both parties are committed to improving patient care by delivering on demand, point of care access to physicians. Sometimes specialists or other providers may not be available for significant periods of time to the prison system, but this telehealth partnership will increase access to quality care regardless of the number of available providers in various institutions throughout the state.

“Telehealth is poised to improve the health of all South Carolinians, and this connection is a significant advance furthering that mission,” said James McElligot, M.D., MUSC Telehealth medical director. “The technologies, when wisely applied, can transcend the significant challenges in providing care to this population and have tremendous potential for cost savings to our state. This effort is yet another example of how our state legislature’s vision and support has enabled telehealth services to be developed and deployed efficiently.”

The South Carolina Department of Corrections has jurisdiction over 20,620 offenders throughout South Carolina with many facilities located in remote areas. Telehealth services allow physicians to examine inmates while enabling corrections officers to keep potentially dangerous inmates behind bars rather than bearing the cost and security risk of transporting them to hospitals. The ability to provide these services has vastly improved due to technology developments in recent years, including the implementation of electronic medical records.

