
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Volunteer Coaching for Virtual Care Readiness

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Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a push to provide more health and social care services virtually. A significant barrier to broad adoption of virtual care is that many clients and providers do not feel comfortable using virtual care technologies. This can lead to a reluctance to try virtual care or to care visit time being lost to managing technology challenges.

Short Description of Practice Change Implemented

To increase the adoption of virtual care, VHA Home HealthCare created the Virtual Care Volunteer Coaching program to help clients and care providers to prepare for their health and social care visits. The coaching model facilitates confidence-building and increases experience using the virtual care platform, while the integration of volunteers allows the provision of extended individual support. Providers can refer clients for coaching before their scheduled care visits, or request support themselves to gain experience using the virtual platform.

During coaching sessions, which start by phone and end in a video conference, the volunteer and client work through a 'Rehearsal' checklist to confirm that required equipment and services are available, and to provide the client an opportunity to practice each step required to connect with and conduct a virtual visit.

Aim and Theory of Change

In support of the broad adoption of virtual care technologies, this program addresses the "Empower action" step of Kotter's 8 Step Change Model. Coaching reduces barriers to trying virtual care for the first time by supporting participants to 'rehearse' the virtual visit process before a formal care encounter.

Targeted Population

This program supports clients and providers who are willing to try virtual care but require assistance to become comfortable using the virtual care platforms. Provider consultations and a client partner informed program development. Feedback from clients and providers informs ongoing improvements.

Timeline

This program started in September 2020 with 6 volunteer coaches, focused initially on supporting clients. In November 2020, the scope was broadened to also offer coaching to care providers. As of February 2021, the service has grown to 10 volunteer coaches.

Highlights

This innovative, client-centered program promotes virtual care adoption by focusing on individual comfort rather than strictly technology needs. Success rates are high: 89% of those offered coaching have accepted, and 96% of participants have completed coaching fully prepared to conduct virtual care visits.

Comments on sustainability

A growing group of volunteers is providing coaching in 7 languages. Process improvements to reduce coordinator involvement in scheduling are reducing the overhead for supporting this program.

Comments on transfer-ability

This model is expected to transfer well to other settings.

Conclusions

High participation rates following coaching referrals validate that the program meets a need for clients and providers. High success rates demonstrate that the coaching and 'rehearsal' model works well.

Discussion

This model should apply well in other settings provided appropriate volunteer coaches can be engaged.

Lessons Learned

Selection of volunteer coaches prioritized their teaching rather than technical abilities, as the latter are more readily augmented. Program feedback reinforces the value of this approach.