

# Virtual Care and the Future of Senior Care

July 22, 2020

With the age of virtual care underway, every senior care patient and their families may soon have access to their entire circle of care through secure apps. Already, digital health tools are proving to be a more effective and efficient way to maximize limited staff and resources to treat patients, and early adopters have begun to expand service offerings and their patient base. The challenge is to make these virtual care services more secure and affordable.

For example, in the early 2000s, Dr. Clare Liddy, a family doctor with The Ottawa Hospital Academic Family Health Team, and endocrinologist Dr. Erin Keely collaborated with the Bruyère Research Institute to develop a digital tool called eConsult. eConsult allows family physicians to virtually consult with any number of specialists involved in the care of patients. Today, this innovation is being used effectively in almost every province. (1)

In an article from the Canadian Medical Association, Dr. Liddy stated that digital tools have the potential to transform patient care for the better - but government-level changes to privacy legislation and fair compensation are still needed. (1)

With long term care homes already buckling under the weight of Canada's booming senior population, virtual technologies could revolutionize senior care for the better.

## **Advantages for Home Care**

### **Decreases risk of infection spread:**

With virtual care, seniors don't have to enter a hospital and risk getting or spreading infection. In fact, they don't even need to leave their rooms. This is particularly relevant in the wake of the coronavirus, where senior populations are highly vulnerable to infection and death.

### **More effective and efficient patient care:**

Being transported to unfamiliar facilities with unfamiliar caregivers can add stress and increase the risk of poor outcomes for senior patients.

For example, CBC news reported that in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, residents of long-term care facilities in Hamilton, Ontario were being transported to hospital "via ambulance with paramedics in layers of isolation gear — a situation that Guder calls "scary" for seniors." (2)

In the same CBC news report, Dr. Panju said, "We don't have to keep transporting [the seniors] all over, moving them from site to site, just to provide the same interventions that we could if we kept them where they are." (2)

Virtual care technologies are particularly advantageous for senior care homes because they bring the care to the patients, giving care home staff shared access to resources and web portals while connecting care home staff to primary and acute settings.

**Maximizes limited expertise and infrastructure:**

Canada is facing an unprecedented boom in its senior population, yet has a relatively small number of specialized geriatric professionals. Virtual care technologies, such as education and training apps, can provide avenues for training and sharing knowledge.

Telecare alarms/sensors, falls monitors, and pendant alarms enable remote monitoring and tracking of patients without overburdening facilities with limited staff numbers.

**Higher quality of care:**

Virtual consultations and health apps connect patients, their families, caregivers, and other healthcare professionals. These technologies make care more collaborative, and bring the patient's families to the table. As a result, patients feel cared for, and their families feel connected and empowered to make informed decisions about their loved ones, and healthcare professionals have the satisfaction of knowing they are delivering high-quality care.

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*Content is current as of the date of broadcast and is subject to change without notice.*

Source:

1. <https://www.demandaplan.ca/post/the-future-of-virtual-care-support-and-care-for-seniors-in-the-comfort-of-home>
2. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-hospitals-launch-virtual-care-with-senior-homes-during-covid-19-outbreaks-1.5539015>