LRH Pre-Admission Telehealth Goes ‘Live’

After many months of careful planning, the Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH) Pre-Admission Telehealth Clinic has commenced the delivery of video call appointments for orthopaedic patients residing in South Gippsland.

The initiative has been made possible thanks to a successful partnership with Gippsland Southern Health Service and funding from the Department of Health and Human Services Telehealth Specialist Clinics 2018 round. The service now enables low-risk patients - who are not requiring an anaesthetic review - to have their pre-surgery assessment close to home and avert the long trip to LRH in Traralgon.

Claire Kent, General Manager of Critical Services at LRH, says the new initiative is an exciting development. “Face-to-face pre-admission appointments can take virtually a whole day for patients and carers, particularly when travel is taken into account,” said Claire. “This service offers a viable alternative and is a patient-centred approach to preparing for surgery.

“We are now seeing the benefits to consumers, who are really appreciative of being able to receive care in a local setting.”

Claire explained that the clinical model involves the patient’s GP, who provides a medical assessment before the actual pre-admission appointment takes place. “This is where our partners at Leongatha Hospital host the video call appointment for the patient and assist in the pre-surgery screening process,” Claire said.

Plans are underway to address the geographic disadvantage of LRH surgical patients, by expanding the service to other Gippsland local government areas in 2019 and beyond.

"This is a great service for patients not living close to Latrobe Regional Hospital”

- Pre-admission telehealth participant and their carer

90,156
...patient kilometres saved since December 2016
New service for Gippsland cancer patients

Latrobe Regional Hospital has partnered with Gippsland Southern Health Service (GSHS) to provide South Gippsland survivorship patients with supported telehealth consultations.

The service will form part of a new Cancer Survivorship Program (CSP) pilot which is being established in the Gippsland region, using a shared-care model between cancer specialists and primary care providers. Survivorship care is an important part of the recovery process from cancer treatment, especially for rural populations who often experience reduced access to local oncology services.

GSHS is situated 134 km south-east of Melbourne at Leongatha Hospital and provides oncology services to South Gippsland patients. This incorporates chemotherapy and fortnightly visits by a doctor specialising in oncology and haematology. Education, counselling and support are offered to patients and their families.

At the end of active treatment, patients are assessed by their oncology specialist for eligibility to the CSP. If eligible, a referral is made to the Survivorship Nurse and the patient’s GP is notified. The pilot project will examine the feasibility of increasing the number of nurses at oncology units and GP practices across the region in a hub-and-spoke model, building capacity to support GPs and addressing survivorship care.

The telehealth component will comprise two appointments, whereby the patient is connected to the survivorship nurse who is located 66km away at Latrobe Regional Hospital. LRH project officer and survivorship nurse Leah Savage is helping to develop the CSP model and has already commenced the delivery of telehealth consultations to participants in South Gippsland.

“The first appointment includes assessment of individual needs,” said Leah.

“This seeks to address the physical and psychosocial effects of treatment, as well as the patient’s general wellbeing in the survivorship phase.”

Leah explained that the second appointment incorporates recommendations for a healthy lifestyle, as well as cancer related information and resources, including the management of late effects.

The video call consultations are being facilitated at Leongatha Hospital by project officer Hannah Deenik, who was recently appointed to the role. The part-time position is funded by Gippsland Regional Integrated Cancer Services (GRICS) and will continue for the duration of the 12-month pilot.

New telehealth clinics now open to referrals

Two new outpatient telehealth clinics are now available to patients of the Gippsland Private Consulting Suites (LRH).

From January, the obstetrics and gynaecology and nephrology clinics will offer telehealth appointments where patients are deemed clinically suitable and meet the MBS eligibility criteria.

The availability of these clinics will compliment the expanding list of services available via video call.

GPs wishing to support patients for telehealth appointments are invited to add a note in the referral letter. Generally, the initial appointment will be face-to-face, providing an opportunity for telehealth to be discussed between the patient and their treating specialist.

During 2018, delivery of outpatient telehealth appointments increased at LRH by more than 50% from the previous year.

So far, 349 video call consultations have taken place since December 2016, with further expansion predicted for 2019. Telehealth referrals for the paediatric, endocrinology, oncology and chronic heart failure clinics are also welcome.
Livestreamed Monash Health Transplant Education Sessions set to expand in 2019

Since the first session in May 2018, videoconferencing technology is now assisting regional and remote dialysis patients and their carers participate in Monash Health transplant education days, without the physical journey to Melbourne.

So far, 3 sessions have been facilitated, reaching 48 patients, carers and supporters across Victoria...

- **First session:**
  - May 2018
  - 5 attendees, one site

- **Second session:**
  - August 2018
  - 26 attendees, three sites

- **Third session:**
  - November 2018
  - 17 attendees, two sites

Monash Health now plans to extend the remote education model to Tasmania and South Australia in 2019, paving the way for interstate renal patients to participate.

See page 4 for more about how this service emerged. Below: LRH hosts a livestreamed transplant education session

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Meet Our Clinicians: Kate MacDonald, Gippsland Southern Health Service

Kate MacDonald is a registered nurse and clinical nurse specialist. Prior to joining GSHS in 2014, Kate spent ten years at a major Melbourne private hospital as the unit manager of an orthopaedic ward.

Over the past five years, Kate’s professional roles at GSHS have included providing clinical support in day surgery, covering approximately one third of her EFT. Scoping and establishing a Day of Surgery Admission (DOSA) service is another role Kate has performed, through a project that seeks to improve processes for pre-admission patients.

“At least 30% of our day surgery patients are travelling from Melbourne for cataract and vascular procedures,” said Kate. “The streamlined pre-admission service allows for an initial phone call to the patient, followed by a face-to-face appointment on the day of surgery.”

Kate’s experience in pre-surgery screening has been of great benefit to the recent LRH/GSHS telehealth project, which sees orthopaedic patients supported at GSHS for their pre-operative assessment - thus averting a 130km return trip to LRH.

“My role is to undertake a face-to-face nursing assessment of the patient, which takes around half an hour at Leongatha Hospital,” Kate said. “After securely forwarding the results to the LRH pre-admission nurses via electronic transfer, the patient is then connected via a video call using a Cisco WebEx DX80 device.”

Kate explained that the telehealth component commences with an occupational therapy assessment - again for half an hour - followed by a consultation with the pre-admission doctor. The entire process takes approximately 2 hours, which equates to a considerable time saving for patients and carers.

“What we’re finding is that the whole experience is far less tiring for members of our community, many of whom are experiencing discomfort as they await their joint replacement surgery,” said Kate. “Receiving care locally enhances the patient’s quality of life and provides some respite for carers. We estimate the whole process is halving the time that would be spent if the patient was onsite at LRH, plus around 2 hours in travel.”

Kate sees telehealth as an application with huge potential, particularly as transport and parking challenges become more evident in metropolitan Melbourne.
Finding a solution: the value in partnerships

Gail Mounsey is a Gunai Kurnai woman from Gippsland in Victoria and is one of two Aboriginal Health Liaison Officers at LRH. The focus of Gail’s work is to assist Aboriginal patients and their families who are accessing services at the hospital.

Gail has become increasingly aware of the potential benefits telehealth can bring to Aboriginal communities. Last year, Gail visited some of the Gippsland Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) with LRH Telehealth Facilitator, Barb Radley. There were positive discussions about partnering with the ACCHOs and increasing access to specialist care. As it turns out, a chance conversation during one of these ‘road trips’ had had an unexpected outcome, leading to a new and unique service model being developed in collaboration with Monash Health Department of Nephrology.

As Gail explains, the new model was hatched from an idea when a solution was needed quickly. “We had just been to visit one of the ACCHOs on a Monday afternoon and I was describing to Barb the difficulty in finding a volunteer driver. We needed to identify a way of assisting a Koori patient, who was required to attend a transplant education session at Monash Health in Clayton - on the Wednesday morning.”

“The dilemma we were faced with was asking the driver to collect the patient in the Latrobe Valley, be at Monash Health by 9:00am, wait for 4 hours and return to Gippsland. That’s a big ask for a volunteer - plus having to negotiate peak-hour city traffic. The early start would have been really difficult for both the patient and the driver, but the patient needed to attend in order to be placed on the kidney transplant waiting list.”

The conversation quickly progressed. Could the education be delivered by video link-up, with the patient supported in Gippsland by the LRH Dialysis Unit? The next step was to make a phone call to Nicole Bate, Monash Telehealth and Telesurgery Coordinator - who then met with the Transplant Nurse Coordinators and asked the question. Remarkably, everything was organised within 24 hours, just in time for the session’s delivery. Five participants attended and two more events have been facilitated since that time.

Latrobe Regional Hospital, Moogji Aboriginal Council, South West Healthcare and Barwon Health have all supported the education sessions so far, enabling patients and their families to actively participate in the four-hour program while feeling supported at their local hospital or ACCHO.

“Gippsland hospitals and ACCHOs often provide transport for their clients’ medical appointments, both regionally and in the city. Distance, coupled with the logistics of getting there, can be a real challenge”

- Gail Mounsey, LRH Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer

Contact Us

The LRH Telehealth Facilitator can be contacted Monday to Friday during business hours:

Ph. 5173 8022 or bradley@lrh.com.au

For information on patient eligibility and available resources, visit the ‘LRH Telehealth’ webpage: