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# NURSES

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Focus On:

# Best of 2011

# Remote Control

Home-based cardiac monitoring systems allow nurses to help patients gain control over potentially life-threatening medical conditions

By Diana Friedman

The true goal of home care is to keep patients healthy enough to remain in their homes. Now, home care nurses throughout the country have a new ally in helping their patients meet this goal: a telehealth monitoring system. The system is installed in a patient's home and the patient goes through a series of simple tests every day, so homecare nurses know exactly what is going on with their patients at all times, even on days when they don't visit the patient's home.

Remote cardiac monitoring systems are

appropriate for patients with a variety of conditions, such as congestive heart failure, COPD, diabetes, coronary artery disease and hypertension.

"Any alteration in the normal functioning of a system in the human body has an effect on the heart," said Gail Sussman, BSN, RN, director of patients services, Visiting Nurse Association of Long Island (VNA of LI), Garden City, NY.

## How It Works

Patients use the cardiac monitoring system at a specific time each day, "usually in the morning, so nurses have time to monitor results and intervene during the day if necessary," Sussman said. The machine talks patients through every step of the process, such as stepping on and off the scale and putting on the blood pressure cuff.

A home care nurse programs the machine to ask patients questions that pertain to their specific health concerns. For example, a nurse could program the system to ask, "Have you fallen in the past 24 hours?"

Getting this information on a daily basis "allows nurses to personalize the care plan for the patient. We are also able to coordinate with the patient's doctor to, for example, adjust a medication, without the patient having to go in for a visit," said Angella Colley, RN, COC, a home care nurse with First to Care Home Care Inc., a joint venture between MJHS, New York, and Maimonides Medical Center, Brooklyn.

## Empowering Patients & Nurses

Although monitoring patients is an integral part of the home care nurses' role, what Colley enjoys most is the ability to educate patients and family members. "We educate the patient on the disease process, medications and diet, which brings a positive result," she said.

"Clients become much more invested in their health," said Cathy Pistone, BSN, RN, director of community relations for VNA of LI and a former home care nurse. "If they eat Chinese food for dinner, they can see the increase in blood pressure and weight the next day," and they start making healthier choices.

"One of the very best rewards is to see a patient who starts out without any control over their medical management gain full control," Colley said. "They become empowered to take charge of their health. They are excited to show you their results when you visit."

## Peace of Mind

Carla Giugno, BSN, RN, vice president of clinical operations, Visiting Nurse Association of South Central Connecticut, New Haven, agrees: Patients feel empowered using telemonitoring systems.

"The patients use the system in the morning, and it just becomes part of their daily routine," Cruz explained. "Many of the patients like the process of checking in with the telemonitoring system. It gives them a sense a reassurance that someone is checking in on them without the hassle and expense of going to a doctor's office."

## Reducing Healthcare Costs

Most ED visits tend to result in hospitalization, Colley points out.

"If we don't want the same patient constantly revolving in and out of the system, we need to monitor the patient and give the patient control over his condition," she said. This means noting trends in a patient's health, such as rising blood pressure or weight, and addressing those trends before they lead to an emergency.

"Telehealth reduces costs by saving ED visits, hospitalization and physician office visits," Sussman agreed. "I believe the future of telehealth will only grow and expand in today's healthcare arena."

But, said Sussman, it's important to remember while telehealth can save the health system money, the ultimate goal is to keep the patient healthy and at home. With remote cardiac monitoring, both goals can be accomplished simultaneously. ❖

**Diana Friedman** is former regional editor at *ADVANCE*.



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