

# Telemedicine to be offered in Edgerton nursing home come February

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## **EDGERTON**

Patients at Edgerton Care Center soon won't have to leave the facility to receive specialty health care thanks to the addition in February of telemedicine for all its patients.

Telemedicine is a virtual health care service that allows physicians to consult with and treat patients via video chat during hours when physicians often are not available, such as nights, holidays and weekends.

Many nursing homes in the state have started to explore the technology, but the Edgerton facility will be one of the first to implement it, said Bob Siebel, CEO of Carriage Healthcare Companies, which operates Edgerton Care Center.

He hopes telemedicine will reduce the number of readmissions to emergency rooms for nursing home residents, he said.

“Any time you (take) someone who has a number of chronic conditions and relocate them, even for a couple of hours, that’s not necessarily good for that person,” Siebel said.

Residents will not pay additional costs for telemedicine services, Siebel said. The service is an expense exclusively for the nursing home.

The preventive care telemedicine provides outweighs the cost and could save the company in the long run, Siebel said.

New York-based TripleCare will provide Edgerton Care Center with its telemedicine technology and doctors, according to a news release.

TripleCare CEO Mary Jo Gorman said 80 percent of patients who use their telemedicine services are treated and cared for in their nursing homes without a trip to the emergency room.

About half the patients who use the service likely would have been sent to an emergency room if not for the technology, Gorman said.

Physicians can treat Edgerton Care Center residents from anywhere in the country with telemedicine, so long as the doctors are licensed to provide treatment in Wisconsin, Gorman said.

Telemedicine physicians commonly address conditions such as shortness of breath, low-grade fever and early bladder infection, Gorman said.

“The ability to help that patient be evaluated and treated right in facility is a tremendous benefit to the patient,” Gorman said.

## Telemedicine elsewhere

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SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital-Janesville has used telemedicine in its intensive care unit and emergency neurological department since the hospital opened in 2012, said Jason Steinke, the hospital’s director of emergency medical services.

Telemedicine physicians use high-definition cameras to exam the patient externally and monitor IV pumps and vital sign monitors, Steinke said. Physicians have access to patients’ electronic medical records to ensure continuity of care.

Strokes are time-sensitive emergencies, said Andrea Hughes, chest pain coordinator at St. Mary’s. Receiving expert consultation in a timely manner is crucial for stroke patients.

“One of the biggest benefits is it gives us an additional expert consultation,” Hughes said.

Patients in the intensive care unit can receive care immediately from a telemedicine doctor in the event an on-site doctor is with another patient or is unavailable, Steinke said.

Some patients are concerned about having a camera in their room at all times, but cameras are only activated with notice and are turned off when not in use, Steinke said.

St. Mary's is considering expanding its neurological telemedicine to inpatient services, not just the emergency department, Steinke said.