Look What's Next in Telemedicine

In 1988, I suggested that physicians have fax units in their offices. This was long before facsimile transmission became generally popular. What a fast, efficient way to receive lab results, X-ray reports, consultations and authorization forms! At the time, very few physician offices around the country had faxes. Now, most do with some having several fax units in the workplace as well as a fax or two at home.

The October 2004 issue of the Journal was dedicated to telemedicine entitled “Tele-Health: Technology for Teaching, Learning and Caring.” Manuscripts included:

How Hawaii/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) is using technology to make the Pacific smaller; Distance Learning on the Internet: Web-based Archived Curriculum; The Virtual Hospital: Treating Acute Infections in the Home by Telemedicine; Shriners Hospitals for Children: Honolulu's Experience with Telemedicine; A Novel Approach to Tele-Echocardiography across the Pacific.

With the development of the worldwide web, communications have again flashed forward. Just a few years ago it was impossible to contemplate e-mail, picture transmission, EKGs, PET and CT scans. Look how far technology has come!

Cell phones are now truly ubiquitous. Some patients who have English language difficulties and who don't present with a translator use a cell phone to contact a relative or friend, then pass the phone to the physician to get translations. Though this method is not preferable to using a professional translator, it is far less frustrating to the patient, the staff and to the physician.

The Physician Assistant and Telemedicine

After looking for the perfect Physician Assistant for many years, I finally found one. Laura Ginoza, PA-C practices with me in my primary office in Chinatown. Because half of each week I care for patients at Kula Hospital & Clinic and at my satellite office in Wailuku, I purchased Verizon wireless LG-VX8000 camera phones so that she can record and transmit photos as well as video clips to augment our long distance phone conversations, to speed patient diagnoses and recovery.

Now I can be reached in my virtual office at the patient's moment of need, with visual clarity on neighboring islands and even on the mainland, connected by cell phone and pictures with my Physician Assistant to discuss patient problems. Patients appreciate this full time access.

As the American Academy of Physician Assistants points out, Physician Assistants are Partners in Medicine.

PA's are graduates of accredited PA programs, and must pass a single national certification exam jointly developed by the National Board of Medical Examiners and the National Commission on Certificates of Physician Assistants. Only those individuals with current certification may use the designation “Physician Assistant - Certified” or “PA-C.”

To maintain certification, PA's must earn 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and sit for a recertification exam every six years. The requirements keep them informed of medical advances.

PA's are highly skilled professionals educated to use the same medical procedures as their physician counterparts. For example, PA's take medical histories, perform physical examinations, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret laboratory tests, perform minor surgery, and prescribe medications. PA's practice in almost every medical specialty from family medicine to surgery.

If you have a busy office and need an extra right arm, consider a Physician Assistant.

References