



THE FIRST 100 DAYS

Avera Health, Aultman Hospital, UW Health and Intermountain: The First 100 Days to a Successful Telehealth Program

Health systems look to telehealth as an essential part of healthcare delivery, helping them to attract new patients and improve care. To launch a successful telehealth program with longevity—and opportunities for expansion—strategic alignment between a health system’s operational, clinical and marketing teams is essential. Executives from UW Health, Intermountain Healthcare, Avera Health and Aultman Hospital recently shared their perspectives on the keys to getting started.

Put the Right Operational Structure in Place

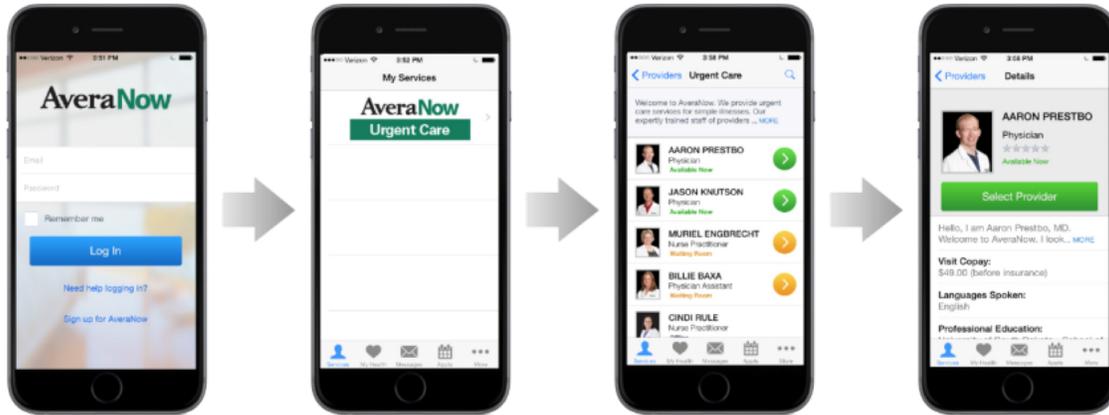
A successful telehealth program should be interwoven into how health systems deliver care to patients, becoming another avenue for distributing high-quality care. To integrate telehealth across the system, it’s critical to have a strong operational structure in place before expanding the program system-wide.

Avera Health, a fully integrated health system based in Sioux Falls, SD, partnered with American Well to launch its direct-to-consumer telehealth service, AveraNow, in 2015. Before launch, the health system took steps to ensure the program had lasting success.



Phased Approach: For the initial direct-to-consumer telehealth launch, Avera chose to focus solely on urgent care. As part of its urgent care program, Avera introduced a retail strategy, placing telehealth kiosks in Hy-Vee grocery stores to attract new patients. After seeing success with the urgent care program and optimizing workflows, Avera expanded its direct-to-consumer initiative to other service lines, including school-based care and eGestational diabetes.

Avera Health's direct-to-consumer mobile experience



Executive Leadership Buy-In: Support from executive leadership is essential to telehealth program success. This support dictates the direction and strategy of the program, and ensures the program has adequate staffing and funding. Avera already had a nationally recognized business-to-business telemedicine network in place, which reached 275 healthcare facilities and benefited over 18,000 patients each month. Due to the success of its eCare program, Avera had support from the highest levels of the organization to pursue a direct-to-consumer telehealth program, including Deanna Larson, CEO of Avera eCare, and Fred Slunecka, COO of Avera Health.



Clearly Defined KPIs: It's important, particularly in the beginning, to define telehealth program key performance indicators (KPIs) and properly measure these KPIs in an ongoing manner. Avera determined three goals for its direct-to-consumer urgent care program:

1. Assist Avera Health Plan with diverting patients away from unnecessary office-based and emergency room care
2. Create a strong affiliation with Avera primary care providers
3. Attract new patients

In the first 12 weeks after launching AveraNow, Avera added more than 100 new patients to the Avera Health System. Avera also saw success diverting patients away from unnecessary office and ER care. When they add new telehealth workflows, they follow the same process of identifying KPIs that map back to their company goals and setting up programs to measure success on these goals.



Engaging the Skeptics: The earlier health systems address potential program blockers, the more seamless the implementation process will be. Before Avera's telehealth implementation began, there was concern among physicians that AveraNow would take patients away from their brick-and-mortar practices. Avera engaged directly with its medical group early on to define the AveraNow program and address these concerns. They held in-person meetings, created informative write-ups, and delivered updates in a regular medical group update from Avera's Chief Medical Officer.

Aultman Hospital's Post-Acute Care Operational Strategy

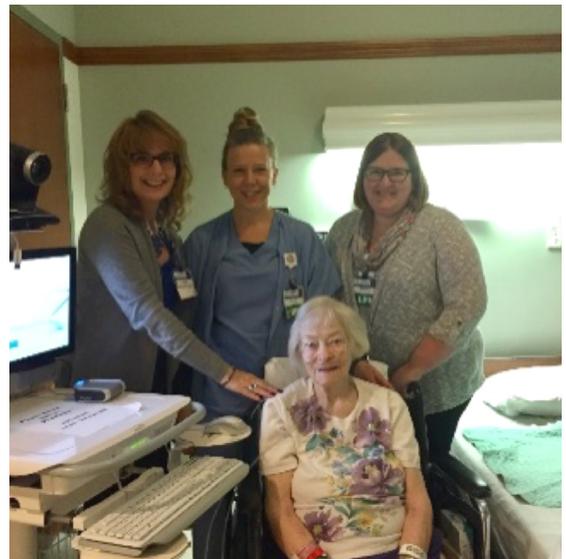
For health systems looking to launch an acute telehealth program, a strong operational structure is equally essential to success. Aultman Hospital, a non-profit hospital located in Canton, Ohio, partnered with American Well to launch a post-acute care program, and got started with a similar operational approach to Avera Health.



Phased Rollout: Aultman launched its post-acute telehealth program with remote cardiology appointments. The hospital was looking to improve patient access to cardiologists after patients were discharged from the hospital and went to a skilled nursing facility. Since launching post-acute telehealth, Aultman plans to expand to Telestroke.



Executive Leadership Buy-In: Improving post-acute care was part of a broader strategic hospital initiative. Because telehealth was an important piece of this strategy, it had the full support of the hospital executives. Aultman Hospital also had a well-respected cardiologist as its physician champion for the program, which gave the program credibility internally.



Aultman deployed carts to skilled nursing facilities



Clearly Defined KPIs: Prior to the implementation of telehealth, patients at the skilled nursing facility would have follow-up in-office visits scheduled with a cardiologist. Many times, patients experienced changes in condition well before their scheduled appointments, which required patients to be transferred back to the hospital and readmitted. Through its telehealth program, Aultman aimed to reduce readmissions and transfer costs, and improve patient outcomes at skilled nursing facilities. To date, Aultman has seen a decrease in transportation costs, improvement in missed appointments, and improvement in patient care due to the post-acute telehealth program.



Engaging All Stakeholders: Aultman Hospital learned a valuable lesson in addressing a program blocker prior to its telehealth implementation. "We should have involved legal sooner in the process because there were some agreements we put together with cardiology and the skilled nursing facility, and the legal component took longer than expected and delayed our timeframe," said Kathy Zimmer, RN, executive director of e-health services at Aultman Hospital.



Cross-Functional Telehealth Organization Structure: Kathy Zimmer led Aultman's operational team and worked with the clinical and technical teams during implementation.

Clinical: Aultman's physician champion began by staffing the service two days a week for one hour. The physician saw anywhere from two to four patients in an hour. Since launch, Aultman has expanded the service to include four practicing providers, including cardiologists, APRNs and physician assistants.

Technical: The operational team worked together with the technical team to thoroughly test the telehealth technology prior to launch—including on-site at the hospital and off-site at the skilled nursing facility. Testing the technology prior to launch helped create a smoother roll-out and patient experience.

Recruit Physician Champions

The clinical team should be highly involved from the onset of the telehealth program. UW Health, the integrated health system of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, engaged its clinicians from the start and developed a physician-focused telehealth program. In 2017, the health system went live with its direct-to-consumer urgent care telehealth service to improve patient access, enhance provider satisfaction, reduce costs and increase market share. Here is how the health system integrated telehealth with providers in mind:



Identify a Physician Champion: The person who is going to drive physician adoption of telehealth is the physician champion. UW Health identified its physician champion as Dr. Tom Brazelton. As the medical director of telehealth at UW Health, Dr. Brazelton was responsible for engaging UW Health physicians in telehealth, establishing clinical guidelines and protocols, and being the clinical voice in the telehealth implementation process.



Establish an Engagement Plan to Encourage Adoption: It's common for providers to have concerns about telehealth—especially when it comes to the impact telehealth will have on their brick and mortar practices. The best way to ease concerns and encourage provider adoption is to engage providers early in the implementation process. UW Health had some providers who were leery about delivering care via video. To encourage utilization and adoption, Dr. Brazelton walked the providers through the platform and demonstrated how easy it was to make that sick-not-sick determination via video. “Once we showed them the platform, the detractors were all in,” explains Dr. Brazelton. “The provider satisfaction is now very high and providers advocate for the program.”



Fit Telehealth into Existing Workflows and Practices: Telehealth should not be practiced in a silo; it should be integrated into a provider's current workflow. UW Health integrated its telehealth program into two of its urgent care locations. There are 15 UW Health providers—both physician assistants and nurse practitioners—who staff the service for 40 hours a week. “We did a heat map of urgent care visits to determine the best time to staff the service,” says Dr. Brazelton. To provide patients with 24/7 care via telehealth, UW Health works with Online Care Group, American Well's online medical group, to cover the system outside of those 40 hours covered by UW Health providers.



Establish Telehealth Clinical Guidelines and Protocols: Maintaining high clinical quality via telehealth was important to UW Health. To ensure the highest clinical standards were met, Dr. Brazelton worked with UW Health's Clinical Quality Management team to establish and vet clinical protocols specific for telehealth. The health system utilized many of American Well's Online Care Group clinical protocols, as well as established their own. Post launch, UW Health continues to monitor clinical quality through monthly chart reviews, and by viewing diagnoses, treatment, and antibiotic choices for each visit.

Tell them about your service

The growth and success of a telehealth program is often directly associated with a strong communications plan. Intermountain Healthcare, a not-for-profit health system based in Salt Lake City, Utah, executed a comprehensive program to drive results. Intermountain launched its direct-to-consumer urgent care telehealth program, Intermountain Connect Care, in 2016. "At Intermountain we have great operational and clinical teams. But the trajectory of our growth is attributed to our marketing strategy," says Heidi Middleton, marketing manager at Intermountain Healthcare.



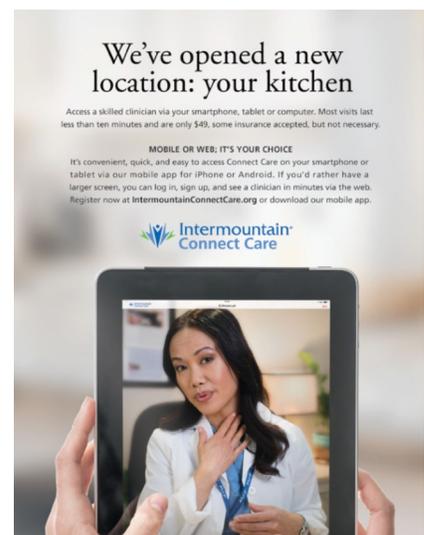
Build on Your Existing Brand: Leveraging a trusted health system brand for a telehealth program will not only help consumers associate the service with the health system, it will assure them that they are receiving that same high-quality care. Intermountain conducted a research study to understand consumer knowledge of telehealth prior to implementation. The health system asked consumers in their market if they had ever heard of telehealth and if so, had they ever used it. They found that only 20% of people had ever heard of telehealth, and only 10% had ever used it. Interestingly, the percentage of people who were likely to use telehealth increased significantly when the service was associated with Intermountain Healthcare. Knowing they had a strong brand within their marketplace, the Intermountain team leveraged the Intermountain brand and named its telehealth service Intermountain Connect Care.



Develop and Incorporate a Communications Plan: Before conducting its research, the Intermountain marketing team assumed that the best way to promote a digital program like telehealth would be through digital marketing. Through its research, however, the health system found that consumers generally weren't aware of telehealth, so its initial marketing strategy needed focus on building mass awareness. To drive awareness, Intermountain promoted Connect Care through TV commercials, radio advertisements and billboards. After the traditional media push, Intermountain layered digital marketing and social media marketing on top to promote engagement. Finally, to drive utilization and keep telehealth top-of-mind, Intermountain deployed email marketing campaigns.



Rollout to Employees First: Two months before its public launch, Intermountain rolled out the program to its employees. "I can't overemphasize how important this audience has been to us," says Heidi. "They're our best critics and our word-of-mouth on the ground. When someone sees a Connect Care commercial and knows someone who works at Intermountain, they're going to ask that person what Connect Care is." To market the program to its employees, Intermountain sent out emails, placed articles in internal newsletters, and used web banners and screen savers on the employee intranet and on computers. "This launch helped us get feedback, work through technology bugs and test messaging," says Heidi. Today, Intermountain continues to market to its employees.



Intermountain Connect Care flyer



Marketing Doesn't End at Enrollment: After its employee launch, Intermountain launched Connect Care to its insurance arm, SelectHealth, and to the public. The health system saw an influx of enrollments for Connect Care. After enrollments, Intermountain sends email communications to enrollees reminding them of the service. This helps keep Connect Care fresh in patients' minds so they remember it when they are sick.

Avera Health, Aultman Hospital, UW Health and Intermountain Healthcare provide great examples of successful telehealth launches—each with a different perspective and key focus. For more information on telehealth implementation strategies and keys to success, [click here](#).