How VirtualCare Can Help the Seniors' Care Sector Respond To COVID-19

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Recommendation

- All of Ontario's seniors' care homes require immediate access to virtual patient visits to effectively manage COVID-19's spread and treatment.

- Virtual access must be deployed without delay across the seniors' care sector to facilitate:

    º Provider-to-provider consultations, initiated on behalf of the patient, to connect on-site seniors' care staff with a patient's extended circle of care. Visits should align with available OHIP billing codes
    º Provider-to-provider consultations, connecting seniors care clinicians with infectious disease experts to build capacity and facilitate real-time knowledge sharing.
    º Reduced transfer of residents to overstrained emergency departments and hospitals.

Key Highlights

- VirtualCare helps flatten the curve by facilitating remote visits between clinicians and patients living in seniors' care facilities. This will reduce transmission risk and protect other patients and staff.

- Partnerships with all existing seniors' care EHR vendors (PointClickCare & MED e-Care) enables direct integration of VirtualCare visit records into the resident's chart.

- VirtualCare limits the need for physicians to enter seniors' care homes to treat ill residents and may help to ensure care continuity should there be a shortage of available physicians.

- VirtualCare supports virtual family visits for socialization, and secure care conferences between front-line staff and families or substitute decision makers.

- Virtual visits enable rapid virtual access to experts and resources for every seniors' care home in Ontario to help clinicians manage the influx of consultations.

- Our team is readily available to support you through the implementation process

Challenge: Protecting Ontario's Most Vulnerable Population During COVID-19

With the WHO's formal declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, we have entered a crucial time in managing the disease. The elderly and people with underlying health concerns — such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease — are likely at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.

Since many seniors reside in long-term care (LTC) homes or retirement communities, the sector has a vital role to play in how we respond to and manage COVID-19 as a nation.

Think Research's VirtualCare, a safe and secure web-based technology with integrations with all existing EHR providers in the sector, can support clinicians by giving them an additional tool to mitigate COVID-19's further spread and impact.

With access to this technology, combined with existing clinical support tools, clinicians gain the ability to treat residents remotely and digitally consult with external medical experts as required. This reduces health system impacts and costs associated with:
• Emergency department transfers
• Risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission
• Capacity in an under-resourced sector
• VirtualCare is aligned with recently updated OHIP billing codes for virtual care.

VirtualCare also enables consultations, initiated on behalf of the patient, connecting on-site senior care staff with a patient's extended circle of care.

Given the pace of virus spread in other countries, particularly among senior communities, timely action and mobilization is required for Ontario to realize the full benefits of a cohesive digital health response to COVID-19.

How VirtualCare Can Support the Sector's COVID-19 Response

Rapid Access to Leading Geriatric and Infectious Disease Experts: As COVID-19 transmission increases among our elderly population, we anticipate an immediate need for staff within the seniors' care sector to consult with physicians who specialize in infectious diseases. This need for timely information to treat residents with COVID-19 diagnoses is likely to be concurrent with ongoing needs to support residents in their general care.

Making virtual COVID-19 consults available to the seniors' care sector through the Expert Clinical Taskforce, co-located at Baycrest and the University Health Network (UHN), would provide Ontario's care homes with rapid access to appropriate experts (e.g., infectious disease specialists). This makes available immediate diagnosis or treatment options that would otherwise be out of scope. This access is particularly important for small homes or those located in rural areas to ensure equitable, standardized access to care across Ontario.

Virtual visits would ensure that residents with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis receive timely and appropriate care, thus reducing the risks of the infection spreading to other residents, family members, or staff. VirtualCare may also reduce the volume of visits to Emergency Departments, which are already at capacity.

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[1]Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, March 8, 2020.
[2] Ministry of Health, March 13, 2020

Digital Support to Reduce Social Isolation: COVID-19 has instigated an unprecedented period of uncertainty, social upheaval, and potential isolation. At this time, it is critical for seniors' care home staff to help residents remain connected with their families and friends, particularly concerning their medical condition, decisions and mental health. Social interaction is crucial to residents' mental and physical well- being, which may be impacted significantly during an outbreak.

Reducing Transfers to Overburdened Emergency Departments and Hospitals: It is critical to limit everyone's exposure to COVID-19 while continuing to provide Ontarians with excellent care. Through virtual visits, residents may receive expert clinical attention without the need to be transferred to overburdened emergency departments, therefore limiting their risk of exposure to COVID-19 and reducing secondary transmissions.

Resource Capacity Building and Healthcare Equity: VirtualCare ensures care home staff will continue to be supported by physicians in the event that external personnel become unable to travel to the home. Virtual visits also give physicians the opportunity to provide personalized care while limiting their individual exposure to COVID-19. For homes located outside of major city centers, virtual physician visits also increases equitable access to care continuity.

VirtualCare Features for Seniors' Care

- **Triage Capability:** Front-line staff in care homes can access added functionality to effectively and efficiently triage new requests and coordinate virtual visits for residents in their care.
- **Information Sharing:** Clinicians and family members can share relevant clinical notes or attach documents, educational materials, and links during the virtual visit. Consultation documentation completed during a VirtualCare visit will be automatically transferred into the home's EHR (e.g., PointClickCare).
- **Multiple Visit Modalities:** Care home staff may conduct virtual visits with external physicians via asynchronous chat or synchronous audio/video conferencing, giving them flexibility to coordinate care in ways that are mutually beneficial.

Timelines for Implementation

Think Research has announced an expanded partnership with PointClickCare, effective March 18, 2020, to make virtual visits available in tandem with our existing clinical support tools for the seniors care sector. Discussions with other leaders in the sector are also underway.

For Further Information
If we can assist in your response to COVID-19 in any way, please contact Brynne Eaton-Auva'a, Vice President, Business Development, at 1-877-302-1861 ext. 330 or by email at brynne@thinkresearch. com.

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