
Telehealth Fills Harvey Gap



Medical services in southeastern Texas have been heavily disrupted by Hurricane Harvey. Houston area residents find it difficult to get essential medical care as the offices of primary care physicians have been damaged in the area. The good thing is that telehealth providers go the extra mile to meet the needs of Harvey victims.

Several companies are offering virtual care services by phone or video to individuals affected by the storm. Among the companies providing services are American Well, Doctor on Demand, MDLive and Teladoc. Announcements from the companies say they will offer health services at no charge through 8 September.

For example, Teladoc is offering the free service to all victims of the hurricane, not just Teladoc members. Among those adult and paediatric conditions that can be effectively diagnosed and treated are common conditions including sinus problems, respiratory infection, allergies, cold and flu symptoms and many other non-emergency illnesses.

The services provided by these companies are crucial, considering that flood conditions, like mould in flooded homes, can exacerbate conditions such as asthma. In addition, flood water may carry viruses and bacteria from dead animals, chemicals and other contaminants that could cause serious health problems.

"As hundreds of thousands of Americans are facing a time of need, Teladoc is working to make sure that they can count on readily available access to high quality care, 24/7," says Lewis Levy, MD, chief medical officer of Teladoc. "Our call centre reps and board certified and state-licensed physicians are standing by to help those families who have been displaced from their doctors and regular routines, but who still need non-emergency medical care."

A Texas law, which took effect earlier this year, has abolished the requirement for national companies that a patient-physician relationship be first established in person before telemedicine services can be used.

In addition to the national companies, Texas firms and providers are also pitching in. For example, the Rowe Network, a Houston-based telemedicine practice, is making its network of 50 physicians available at no charge to treat patients affected by Harvey, and they're coordinating with doctors and nurses at shelters to treat patients and write prescriptions.

Star ER, a Lubbock, Texas-based emergency care organisation, has taken a different approach for getting virtual care to patients. It's using a free app that can be downloaded by anyone in the area, which can be used to log in and have a teleconsultation with one of its physicians at its facility. The smartphone-based approach is like receiving a consult via Facetime, the organisation says.

Source: [Health Data Management](#)

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