

# Altru Health System Grand Forks, ND

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- Altru Health System is a community of nearly 3,500 health professionals and support staff, dedicated to caring for our region for more than 130 years.
- Altru serves a vast rural region across North Dakota and Minnesota (18 counties), with four regional clinics.
- Every single county we service has been designated as either a full or partial health professional shortage area.



# How our telemedicine program started

Telehealth began out of necessity in 2007, when we did not have enough nephrology providers to support dialysis patients across the region. To maintain access to care, we launched telemedicine services at our rural Devils Lake clinic, enabling providers to complete required weekly dialysis visits across multiple rural sites without extensive travel.

As the program grew, it became clear that was not just beneficial- it was essential. Frequent weather and travel disruptions routinely impacted patient appointments, especially during winter months when road conditions limit safe travel. Without telemedicine, visits were often canceled, leading to delays in care or requiring patients to travel long distances to Grand Forks ( up to 2 hours one way). Telehealth provides a reliable and sustainable way to ensure timely, consistent care regardless of geography or weather.



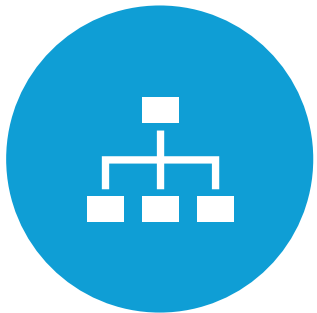
# Our partnership with the American Heart Association



3-year telehealth project centered on telehealth



Started with Family Medicine (which included 4 regional clinics), and our Heart and Vascular clinic. We also expanded our project scope to different clinic specialty areas.



One of only 12 organization in the country to be selected.



Our partnership with the American Heart Association's Center for Telehealth Learning Collaborative has been highly impactful. Through their grant support and shared-learning environment, we've been able to strengthen and expand our telehealth services while also contributing our own insights and best practices to fellow AHA-affiliated programs.

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## **Drivers**

1. The need to modernize telehealth equipment across sites.
2. Lack of standardization and inconsistent equipment made staff support between rooms, difficult.
3. Patients experienced varying levels of care during telehealth visits.
4. Competing job duties limited staff ability to stay current on training and tips.

## **SMART Goal**

Standardize telehealth equipment and training to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of telehealth appointments, as well as provide a seamless experience for patients and providers. Implement a standardized checklist, equipment catalog, and training schedules.

# Standardization Process



Compiled a comprehensive inventory of all telehealth rooms by collaborating with clinic and department managers.



Evaluated existing equipment capabilities, prioritizing multifunctional options to improve efficiency.



Purchased and piloted one new model within one department to assess functionality and user experience.



Developed standardized rooming sheets for each department to ensure consistency in patient encounters.



Established a clear process for selecting, purchasing, and implementing telehealth equipment.

# Telehealth Guidelines

- Through this project, we developed comprehensive telemedicine rooming guidelines that outline all the steps needed to support a successful telehealth visit- including scheduling contacts, rooming workflows for nursing staff, and the specific information providers typically need during a virtual encounter.
- The guidelines are centrally housed on an internal webpage, shared with operational teams, and posted in telemedicine rooms to ensure consistency. This keeps everyone- nurses, schedulers, and providers- aligned and working from the same playbook.

## Sample Rooming Guide for a Cardiology Telemed Visit

Provider's Nurse:	Phone:
Scheduling number:	Phone:
Reception Desk:	
TELEMED CONNECTION: Video name/identity:	Phone:

Nursing Assessment information:				
Labs	X		O2 sats	X
Height	X		Pulse	X
Weight	X		Pain	X
Temperature	X		Medication list	X
Blood pressure	X		Report on Edema	X
Respirations	X			

Physical Assessment during live connection-as appropriate for specific patient assessment:		
Constitutional/General appearance	Alert, cooperative, no distress Oriented	When introducing patient to provider, inform them of any significant information.
HEENT	Provider will look for pupillary response, pupil location, reactive to light. EOM: Eye movement by following a moving object without head movement; neck enlargement Oral mucosa: look inside mouth.	Hand Exam Camera: Have the camera ready to give close-up of pupils. The provider may instruct patients to look up to corner or down to floor. Have the camera close enough that the provider can see eye tracking.
Respiratory:	Clear to auscultation with fair chest expansion	Have the Stethoscope logged in and ready. If requested, remove the shirt to see accessory muscle use of rib area.
Cardiovascular:	Cyanosis Peripheral edema Pulses Cardiac sounds	Use the Hand Exam Camera to view skin color of fingers etc., as instructed or ankles for edema. Pulses: verbally report pulses. Use the Steth for cardiac sounds.

Sample Guide for Troubleshooting

<b>Power On the Camera</b>	Hold the power button for 3 seconds Wait 25 seconds for camera to fully boot. <i>Turn Camera on before calling the provider</i>
<b>Activate Live Video (UVC) Mode</b>	On the camera's touchscreen > Go to <b>Settings</b> , select <b>UVC Mode</b> to enable the live video. <i>This must be repeated if the camera is disconnected or powered off/on.</i>
<b>Connect Camera to PC</b>	Use <b>ONLY</b> the cable provided with the camera Open <b>Video system</b> – live video feed will display automatically.
<b>Adjust brightness and focus as needed</b>	<b>Brightness:</b> Tap the icon to adjust. <b>Focus:</b> Tap to toggle between Auto Focus and Manual Focus.
<b>Lens Modules</b>	Attach the appropriate lens for the exam. <b>Attach:</b> Align the marks on the lens and <b>rotate clockwise</b> until it clicks. <b>Remove:</b> rotate <b>counterclockwise</b>
<b>Maintenance &amp; Care</b>	Clean lenses and specula with a soft cloth and 70% ethyl alcohol after each use. Store all in a clean, dry place.

**✖ Troubleshooting**

<b>No Live Feed?</b>	Ensure UVD mode is enabled. Confirm the USB connection and that the camera is powered on. Verify that the correct camera is selected in VidoConnect.
<b>Blurry Image?</b>	Clean lens or speculum Adjust focus using the touchscreen controls.

<b>IT Service Center</b>	<b>Phone</b>
<b>Telemedicine Tech</b>	<b>Phone</b>
<b>Telemedicine Coordinator</b>	<b>Phone</b>

# Digital Comfort

- We started with a trial of the equipment in one telehealth room and gathered feedback from the nurse, provider, and patient on usability, clarity, and workflow fit. This helped us select equipment that kept things simple and consistent across all rooms.
- The standardized equipment and workflows has made it easy for staff to adapt. Once nurses complete training, they can transition seamlessly from a provider-based role into telemedicine.
- We also created detailed tip sheets based on feedback from nurses who don't have IT backgrounds. Everything is step-by-step. The goal was to remove anxiety and make it feel manageable.
- Our equipment manuals now reflect real workflow—not technical language. They include step-by-step instructions and quick “tips and tricks” for common issues. Helpdesk numbers are clearly listed for anything that requires IT support.
- The goal is quick resolution without disrupting clinic flow.

## Early Findings



- The updated equipment has led to an increase in provider confidence and efficiency across all telemedicine visits.
- Updated rooming guides have created a more seamless and consistent experience for patients systemwide.
- Enhance camera capabilities have improved the clarity and overall quality of the virtual visits.
- The combination of standardized equipment and workflows has strengthened staff adherence and consistency in telehealth delivery.

**- Jessica Piseno, Telemedicine  
Clinical Coordinator**