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Improved Access to Cardiac Rehabilitation Services for Rural Veterans

Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) services have been shown to provide significant health benefits to patients with cardiovascular disease. However, in rural communities, geographical barriers can make it difficult for patients to access CR services. A new program known as Telephone-Based Cardiac Rehabilitation was created to lessen the barriers to care for those unable to utilize traditional CR services. In a pilot project at the Iowa City VA comparing a telephone-based CR program to a traditional face-to-face CR program, 48 participants chose the remote telephone-based program, and 14 chose the traditional program. Remote CR participants reported high satisfaction with the care received, and had a higher completion rate of the program than traditional participants (89% remote versus 73% traditional). Following provider approval, participants in the remote program were provided with study equipment and participated in 12 weekly phone appointments. An American Heart Association-endorsed program guide was discussed with participants, containing information on healthy eating, physical activity, smoking cessation, losing weight, coping with emotional stress, and improving provider communication. The remote CR program continues to be successful and is being expanded in several facilities across the US. **Citation:** Telemedicine and e-Health. January 2014 (1) 32-38. ◆

Did You Know?

- About 600,000 people in the U.S. die of heart disease each year. Every 1 in 4 deaths is attributable to heart disease.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.
- Each year, 715,000 Americans suffer from a heart attack. 190,000 of these occur in patients who have previously suffered a heart attack.
- In the US, someone suffers a heart attack every 34 seconds. Although 92% of people surveyed in 2005 recognized chest pain as a symptom of a heart attack, only 27% of respondents were aware of all major heart attack symptoms enough to know to call 9-1-1.
- Heart disease disproportionately affects minority individuals; as of 2007, African-American men were 30% more likely to die from heart disease than White men.
- Approximately half of all American adults have at least one risk factor for heart disease, including inactivity, obesity, high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, high cholesterol, or diabetes.
- Lowering blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight can each significantly lessen one's risk of heart disease.



Sources: (www.cdc.gov, www.hhs.gov) ◆

VBA Making Progress in Reduction of Claims Backlog; Down by 36% Since March 2013

Since March 2013, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has made significant reductions to the claims backlog, reducing claims pending over 125 days by 36%. In addition, 99.9% of claims pending over two years have been completed, and 97% of claims pending one year through last October were completed. In a December hearing before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, VA Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey stated, "We know there is much more work to be done to reach our goal of eliminating the disability claims backlog in 2015. But I'm encouraged that the improved tools and processes we've put in place so far are having a real impact so that we may better serve our nation's Veterans, their survivors, and their families." Hickey also noted that the VA's paperless, electronic claims processing system has been successfully deployed to all 56 of the VA's regional benefits offices across the country, 6 months ahead of schedule. This effort to reduce the backlog is expected to continue throughout 2014.

Sources: (<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2505>) ◆

