How $1 million grant will boost Ochsner’s digital health innovations

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A leading digital health initiative that provides remote monitoring for 22,000 patients has been bolstered with the addition of a nearly $1 million grant in the second round of funding from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) COVID-19 Telehealth Program.

The grant program, created by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, will help support New Orleans-based Ochsner Health’s Connected Health telehealth services that provide care to pregnant mothers and patients with diabetes and hypertension.

The money will pay for connected device kits containing scales, blood-pressure monitors and glucometers that support remote monitoring of high-risk patients in rural Louisiana and Mississippi. These are among areas that were hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to an FCC news release.

Ochsner, an AMA Health System Program Member, received a similar grant last year that was divided three ways and was used to:

- Help pay for digital devices such as BP cuffs and glucometers that Bluetooth-connect to home devices like smartphones and tablets as part of a Medicaid pilot.
- Support Ochsner’s Connected MOM program that lowers the need for some routine prenatal in-person visits.
- Pay for patient digital devices used in Ochsner’s telemedicine programs, including a thermometer, an otoscope to look in the ears, a stethoscope to listen to the heart and lungs, and a high-resolution camera for things like dermatologic views and looking at the back of the throat.

In addition to allowing continuous care during the pandemic, Ochsner’s digital medicine services also helped keep the system connected to patients with chronic care needs during hurricanes Laura and...
“Even before the pandemic we saw the need to bring health care to our patients in an approachable and cost-effective way,” David Houghton, MD, Ochsner’s telehealth system chair and digital medicine medical director, said in a news release. “COVID-19 made telehealth a necessity and ensured that patients continued to get quality health care outside of a hospital or clinic.”

Below are highlights from our coverage of the innovative work in digital health going on at Ochsner’s 40-hospitals and more than 200 clinics and urgent care centers across Louisiana, Mississippi and West Alabama.

Taking telehealth to all 50 states and the nation’s capital
Before the COVID-19 pandemic sparked the telehealth boom, Ochsner was already using the technology to manage diabetes and hypertension for patients across the South. It now has a support team in place to implement its regionally successful remote-patient monitoring services in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Telehealth case study: Hypertension Digital Medicine Program
Ochsner launched the Hypertension Digital Medicine Program, which provides digitally enabled chronic disease management in 2015. The program provides highly tailored, adaptive care to help patients improve hypertension control, as detailed in this case study as part of the AMA Return on Health framework for virtual care. It serves about 13,000 people across 10 states.

Giving mothers a digital connection for better care
Ochsner’s Connected MOM (Maternity Online Monitoring) initiative helps moms-to-be measure vitals at home and share them with doctors. The effort caught the attention of some in Congress, who—alarmed by U.S. maternal health inequities—want to take the idea national and made it the foundation for federal legislation: the Connected Maternal Online Monitoring (MOM) Act, a bipartisan bill supported by the AMA.
Freeing up hospital beds with a COVID-19 surveillance program
As hospital beds became occupied early in the pandemic, Ochsner created a remote COVID-19 Surveillance Program to safely manage patients at home. With this program, physicians can monitor patients at home to keep hospital beds open for those who need them most. The remote-monitoring program is designed for patients who do not meet criteria for hospital admission but are at an increased risk for deterioration at home.

Pursuing high technology for high patient impact
Ochsner Chief Clinical Transformational Officer Richard Milani, MD, said, “The opportunities for broad population health initiatives utilizing a growing array of patient-friendly ‘consumer’ technologies have the capacity to transform health care and more effectively manage the epidemic of the 21st century.” Get more insights from Dr. Milani on Ochsner’s high-tech strategy for improving patient care.

Learn more about the AMA medical groups moving medicine to support patient health and the medical profession.