

## Doctor just a phone call away



By Matthew Belson  
GateHouse Media  
Thu Mar 08, 2007, 01:28 PM EST

Brewster -

A Brewster doctor is using technology to bring accessible medical consultation services to extended care facilities for the elderly in Massachusetts.

Dr. Paul Bulat started PhoneDOCTORx, a telemedicine service that provides a two-way videoconferencing connection to provide real-time medical consultation service between emergency medicine and primary care physicians who are on call to caregivers in extended care facilities

such as skilled nursing homes and rehabilitation and assisted living centers.

“Our goal is to take care of patients in the bed,” said Bulat, who is the medical director and chairman of the emergency room at St. Luke’s Hospital in New Bedford.

Bulat started the program two years ago after his mother, Anna, had a stroke and was transferred to a skilled nursing facility near his work in New Bedford.

He noticed sometimes a delay of care during evening or off-business hours when her attending physician could not be reached. The doctor on call, who did not know Anna’s medical history, would often err on the side of caution and direct the staff to transport Anna to the emergency room.

Bulat said transporting patients to the ER for a non-life threatening issue is a common occurrence. He added a number of these trips to the ER could be avoided if a physician on call had access to a patient’s history and could do a more thorough medical assessment.

With the PhoneDOCTORx program, a physician staffs a call center in New Bedford which can be reached by nurses with a question about a patient.

As part of the program, an extensive high-speed wireless network is installed in a facility. A portable video camera is brought into a patient’s room where the doctor in the control center can see and talk to the patient. The nurse provides vital signs and can help the doctor assess the patient.

“What we are doing is leveraging technology over a wide-ranging area,” said Bulat.

The program will soon have the ability to connect via teleconferencing specialists. The doctor on call also has access to patient medical records and the transmission is encrypted and compliant with health privacy laws.

The program has been installed in the New Bedford Healthcare Center and Bulat said requests have been made to expand the program in other facilities in Lexington, Weymouth and Wilmington.

Bulat said the program starts with an agreement with attending physicians for PhoneDOCTORx to provide after-hours coverage. The facility pays for installation of the wireless network (about \$10,000) and a monthly service fee that averages about \$2 per patient per day. Facilities also have to install a super high-speed T-1 cable.

“There is no question we have decreased the number of patients going to the emergency room,” said Bulat.

Since April PhoneDOCTORx has received about 1,200 calls. The program encourages nurses to call the doctor with any questions about patient care. Bulat said a third of the calls involve telemedicine where the portable video teleconferencing device is used. The remainder of the calls were questions about labs.

Bulat said he would like to see the service expanded to the Cape.

*For more information about PhoneDOCTORx visit [www.phonedoctorx.com](http://www.phonedoctorx.com)*

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