

local news

YOUR PHOTOS

We Want to Share Photos from Your Neighborhood

Send your high-quality photos to VillagesPics@gmail.com or 1100 Main St., The Villages, FL 32159. Include your name, phone number and village. Don't forget to name the people in your photo.
 Note: Many of these photos occurred before stay at home advisory was issued.



Family: Jake, the English bulldog of Larry and Rita Perkins, of the Village of Amelia, waited patiently for an ice cream cone from McDonald's.



Travel: Betty and Pat McDonald, of the Village of Osceola Hills at Soaring Eagle Preserve, went on the Rocky and the Rollers cruise on the Harmony of the Seas at the end of February. It was their 10th time cruising with Rocky, and they also celebrated their 52nd wedding anniversary.

Virtual Medical Appointments Expand Care Options

The Villages Health began doing telehealth visits earlier this year at the start of the pandemic.

By MACKENZIE RAETZ
 Daily Sun Specialty Editor

Telehealth remains a popular option for patients nearly eight months after The Villages Health started offering it.

It began doing so at the start of the pandemic, and TVH providers did 8,000 telehealth visits between March 22 and May 8.

Telehealth or telemedicine allows patients to talk with their providers in real time over the phone or video.

Dr. Joseph Rizzi, family medicine physician at Creekside Care Center, said now about half his appointments in a typical week are virtual.

"It's almost a better visit because when they are relaxed they are more open," he said. "Patients sometimes have high blood pressure in the office because of the clinical environment. They are more open in their own home, and sometimes it is a more comprehensive visit."

The Villages Health offers virtual appointments for primary and specialty care.

Patients call TVH to schedule the appointment as they would for an in-person one, and if telehealth will work for the patient's concerns, a virtual visit will be scheduled.

Either video or phone visits are an option, however, Rizzi said video visits are ideal.

"We do encourage the video because you want to see the doctor's face and you can see a person's body language," he said. "But in some cases we can talk to people on the

phone and still get good medicine done."

Providers can go over lab work, do wellness check-ups, behavioral health counseling, post-surgery follow ups and more through telehealth.

Needs such as lab testing, x-rays, physical exams, stitches and injections, however, can't be taken care of virtually.

"But I would not underestimate what could be done through telehealth," Rizzi said. "And I would encourage people to make that an option for the sake of patient safety."

In the spring, UF Health began using a critical care telehealth system available to patients at UF Health The Villages and Leesburg Hospitals. It connected patients in the two hospitals with critical-care physicians at UF Health in Gainesville, ranked as one of Florida's top two hospitals in the state, according to U.S. News & World Report.

It allowed physicians—who could log in anywhere with a computer and internet connection—to be able to access patient records, view diagnostic images, monitor vitals and provide expert medical guidance in real time.

Telehealth services related to stroke care were already available to patients at the hospitals prior to that.

Rizzi encourages anyone who is hesitant to do telehealth to give it a try.

"It's an excellent way for patients to reach out and take care of their medical needs without exposing themselves to COVID," he said. "If it's not for you, it's not for you, but try it and see your doctor from the comfort of your own home."

Specialty Editor Mackenzie Raetz can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5354, or mackenzie.raetz@thevillagesmedia.com.



Dr. Ashley Wood works in an exam room as she speaks with a patient via telemedicine at The Villages Health Creekside Care Center.

Bill Mitchell
 Daily Sun

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