

MEDIA RELEASE

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New telehealth clinic eases the pain for rheumatology patients

The Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service (DDHHS) has introduced a new rheumatology telehealth clinic, saving patients from travelling hundreds of kilometres each year to access specialist services.

Using video-conferencing technologies, patients are able to stay in the region while still being able to receive specialist care from a rheumatologist based at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane.

DDHHS Telehealth Clinical Nurse Consultant Carolyn Bourke said eight patients have so far benefited from the arrangement.

“The clinics were established to reduce the need to travel to Brisbane for every appointment,” Ms Bourke said.

“Sometimes patients just need a review of their affected joints or to discuss their medication requirements.”

Ms Bourke said telehealth consultations were particularly beneficial for patients with rheumatoid conditions.

“These patients live with a degree of pain and therefore travel is sometimes difficult and distressing for them,” she said.

“Additionally, some patients cannot drive to the appointment and require a family member or helper to drive them to Brisbane.”

Leyburn resident Terry Cokley was one of the first patients to benefit from the new rheumatology telehealth clinic. He attended his first telehealth consultation in January.

Previously, Mr Cokley had to travel to Brisbane every three months for appointments.

A nurse is present during his telehealth consultations, and his Pittsworth-based GP provides information directly to the specialist prior to the appointment, if needed.

“It’s much easier to travel into Toowoomba than travelling the 400-odd kilometre round trip,” Mr Cokley said.

“I will at some stage have to travel for a face-to-face appointment, but until that is needed, I am quite happy with the telehealth arrangement.”

Additionally the rheumatology telehealth clinics have provided new learning opportunities for Toowoomba Hospital registered nurses Cathy Carter and Clare Lindenberg.

“The nurses involved in these particular telehealth consultations have visited the rheumatology clinic at the Princess Alexandra Hospital to learn more about rheumatology and the process for assessment of inflamed and affected joints,” Ms Bourke said.

“They learnt how to use the Routine Assessment of Patient Index Data (Rapid 3) score sheet to identify patient’s capacity carry out ‘self-care’, their level of pain and the impact of their condition on their daily life.”

Working with Ms Bourke, the nurses have also developed a specific checklist for telehealth rheumatology clinic appointments to ensure that pathology results, patient’s observations and other documentation are completed prior to the appointment.

“This checklist has now been adopted by other hospital and health services looking to develop rheumatology clinics in their areas,” she said.

Ms Bourke encourages all patients who have to travel for specialist services through the public health system to discuss the option of conducting telehealth consultations with their GP and specialist.

“Where possible and, where clinically appropriate, telehealth is a cost-saving, clinically proven means of communication between patients, clinical staff, GPs and specialists,” she said.

Last financial year, the DDHHS facilitated 4459 telehealth consultations for non-admitted patients across a host of different medical specialities.

Ends

Captions

“Telehealth clinics_nurses”

Toowoomba Hospital registered nurses Cathy Carter and Clare Lindenberg have helped facilitate the introduction of rheumatology telehealth consultations.

“Telehealth clinics_Terry Cokley”

Leyburn resident Terry Cokley was one of the first patients to utilise the new rheumatology telehealth clinics at the Toowoomba Hospital.

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