CASE STUDY

Telemedicine Assists Local Government During Natural Disaster

relyMD
the doctor will see you now

During a natural disaster, it can be hard for people to get the medical attention they require.

For example, patients might forget their important medications during an evacuation, or even worse, might exacerbate an existing medical issue, or could even suffer a new injury or illness.

A recent example of this kind of crisis was Hurricane Florence. This storm struck the North Carolina coast, forcing thousands of people to flee their homes. Thankfully, RelyMD was there to assist a number of evacuees in getting the fast and reliable medical care they needed without putting extra strain on local emergency departments.

The Problem: Hurricane Florence

Beginning on September 14, Hurricane Florence wreaked havoc on North Carolina, displacing many residents to shelters in the Raleigh area. The storm hit land as a Category 1 hurricane just south of Wrightsville Beach and hovered over the state for several days. To help those affected, Wake County created six shelters that hosted about 1,100 people.

As displaced residents arrived, they needed medical attention for both injuries and pre-existing conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and more. Because these people could not go to their primary physician for help, the Wake County shelters had medical teams on staff at the shelters. However, both Wake and Orange County knew these on-site teams would be quickly overwhelmed by patients with complex medical needs, meaning they would have to use Wake County EMS services to send people to community emergency departments for treatment.

While this would work, Wake County officials looked for a simpler and faster way to provide care for patients. That is when they decided to contact RelyMD.

The Solution: Telemedicine from RelyMD

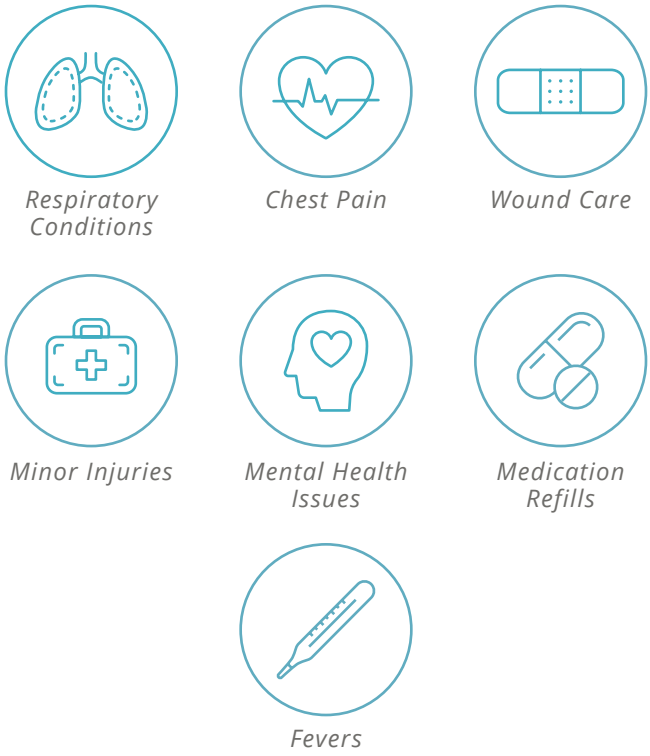
Wake County originally contacted Wake Emergency Physicians, PA (WEPPA), the company that founded and staffs RelyMD, to find volunteer providers to physically staff each shelter. Because WEPPA did not have providers immediately ready to dispatch, it suggested using telemedicine services instead. RelyMD provides telemedicine services to North Carolina residents via our mobile app, website, or by phone.

To prepare local staff to use telemedicine, RelyMD gave an in-service lesson on September 13 to instruct nurses and paramedics on proper use of the equipment. Each shelter utilized an iPad that patients could use to consult with an experienced medical professional. The telemedicine program was up and running in 24 hours, just in time for the arrival of many evacuees.

With telemedicine services properly integrated into the shelters, RelyMD provided each and every patient the virtual care they needed. Overall, RelyMD helped 95 patients throughout the six shelters over a period of 10 days.

Of the 95 patients we cared for, 41% would have been transported to local EDs and 5% to Urgent Care Centers, from the shelters, but after consulting with a RelyMD provider via Telemedicine, we were able to avoid these unnecessary transports. Instead, these patients were able to get care from the nurses employed at the shelter, reducing strain on hospitals and local EMS services.

RELYMD PROVIDERS WERE ABLE TO HELP PATIENTS WITH A NUMBER OF ISSUES, INCLUDING:



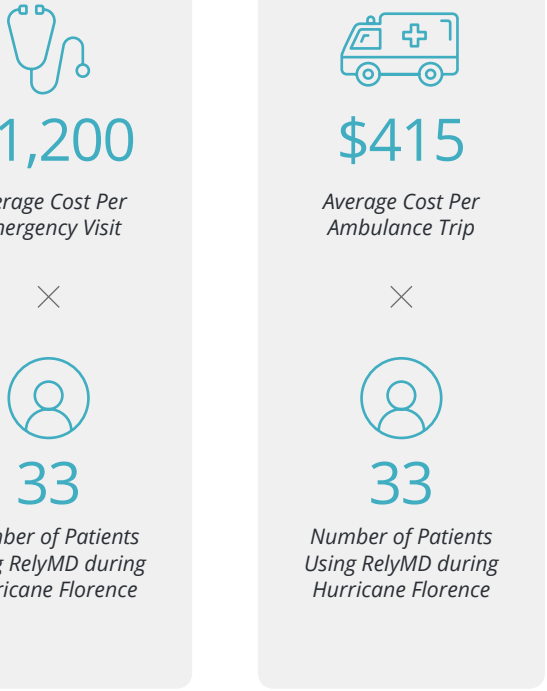
Because most of the RelyMD providers have experience working in a local emergency department, they were easily and quickly able to determine whether a patient's problem was outside the scope of telemedicine care and could refer the patient to an emergency department accordingly. For patients who just needed simple things like medication refills, RelyMD providers were able to provide limited refills at local pharmacies.

How RelyMD Made a Difference During Hurricane Florence

It's clear that RelyMD made a huge difference in the care of evacuees, but just how big was the impact? By saving 33 people from an unnecessary trip to the emergency room, RelyMD saved patients approximately $39,600 (using $1,200 as the average for an emergency department visit).

That wasn't the only way RelyMD saved patients money. Because the service also prevented patients from taking an unnecessary ambulance trip, the service saved evacuees approximately $16,600 by treating them in place (using $415 as the average cost of an ambulance transfer).

The value of RelyMD goes beyond individual patients. Because RelyMD lowered the number of emergency transports, it saved Wake County EMS about 20 hours of labor, freeing them up to care for other individuals in need.



How RelyMD and Telemedicine Can Help in the Future

Hurricane Florence is just one example of how the virtual care provided by RelyMD can assist individuals and government agencies in other natural disasters. With this type of coordination between medical groups, patients won't have to wait as long to get the care they need. And with fewer people going to community emergency departments, both hospitals and EMS services will have more availability to treat patients with serious issues.

In this case, RelyMD was utilized by just two counties, but RelyMD has the capacity for more. Because it exclusively employs local emergency medicine and telemedicine specialists, it has the depth to handle state-wide expansion during times of disaster. This would allow RelyMD to provide professional care to thousands on extremely short notice.

Instead of spending time sourcing volunteer providers and waiting for them to travel to the service location, RelyMD gives government agencies and individuals instant access to medical care, 24/7/365. In fact, the average wait time to see a provider is just seven minutes. Not only will this save on high healthcare costs, but it will allow residents to receive care without leaving the safety and protection of their current location.

RELYMD IS AN EXCELLENT SOLUTION FOR MEDICAL CARE DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

To learn more about how RelyMD can help your organization during a natural disaster, contact us at sales@relymd.com.