

AMAZING PEOPLE DOING AMAZING THINGS

Diabetes Center's Move To Telehealth During the Pandemic Is Seen As A Model For Chronic Disease Management In NH

It is extremely important for those diagnosed with diabetes to plan for emergencies, and even more critical during the current national health crisis. That is why the staff of Exeter Hospital's HealthReach Diabetes Center knew it was essential they rapidly change their patient care model to telehealth as part of our organization's response to the pandemic.

"We realized the work we do to assist these high risk patients in managing their disease is vital to helping them avoid being hospitalized during the pandemic," says **Lucille (Cille) Marvin**, RN, CDCES, Program Manager of Inpatient and Outpatient Diabetes Education. So in mid-March, Cille and her director, **Mary Godfrey**, along with their staff, set to work putting everything in place to switch patient visits over to telehealth. "There were so many people involved in helping us –

Finance, Health Information Management, Information Services, Patient Accounts – we couldn't have accomplished this so quickly without their efforts, and we want to let them know how much we appreciate it," Mary says.

Once the changeover to telehealth appointments was made, the Center's Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialists (CDCES) - **Jane Hackett**, RD, LD; **Lauren Heffernan**, RN; **Emily Johnson**, RD, LD; **Anne Lombard**, RN; and **Amber McGregor**, RN - focused extra attention on their high risk patients, including those newly diagnosed with diabetes, pregnant women with diabetes, and those that require technology, such as insulin pumps, to manage their disease. "The new telehealth technology has enabled us to continue to effectively and creatively manage these patients while keeping them safe," says Cille. As proof of their success, although several COVID-19 patients/patients under investigation for COVID who also had diabetes were admitted to Exeter Hospital between 3/22/20 and 4/27/20, none were outpatients of the Diabetes Center – [CLICK HERE](#) for data. According to Cille, research suggests diabetes and hyperglycemia among people without prior diabetes are strong predictors of mortality among hospitalized patients with COVID-19.

The NH Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS) - Division of Public Health Services realizes the importance of telehealth in managing chronic diseases during the pandemic, and reached out directly to Cille to ask if Exeter would be willing to share best practices. "Our program is well known for its high standards, having received the *Excellence in Diabetes Education Award* from NHDHHS in February," says Cille. "So the State has asked if we would share our experiences, with the goal of supporting a state-wide telehealth education and training model." Not all diabetes education programs in New Hampshire had the ability to change to a telehealth model. "We feel very fortunate to once again be recognized by the State for leading the way in diabetes care," Cille says.

In addition to switching their outpatient appointments to telehealth, the staff of the Diabetes Center also wanted to ensure nurses on the inpatient units had all the resources they might need when caring for a patient diagnosed with diabetes during the pandemic. "It has been very important for us to make sure they feel well-supported. We have worked directly with the inpatient nurse care teams to help support the care of patients on insulin pumps, IV insulin, and those newly diagnosed with diabetes," Cille says. She adds that she has made it a priority to be available 24/7 to the inpatient staff as a way of providing stability to nurses who have been training in, and adapting to, new care environments.

Cille gives credit and kudos to her staff for being able to quickly adapt to a new way of delivering care to their patients. "All of the Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialists, as well as our front office staff – **Leslie Edwards** and **Kim Pirger** – really stepped up and were able to shift quickly to the new model of care delivery. And of course we had a great deal of leadership support from Mary Godfrey," she says. "Through it all we have kept our patients front and center, and believe we have been instrumental in providing the care, education, and self-management tools they need to feel supported through this crisis."



The staff of Exeter Hospital's HealthReach Diabetes Center, back: **Mary Godfrey, Lucille Marvin, Theresa Davis, Kim Pirger, Elizabeth Anderson, Anne Lombard.** Front: **Amber McGregor, Jane Hackett, Emily Johnson, Leslie Edwards, Lauren Heffernan.**