

Citizen photo/Jeannette Boner

This is not an instructional YouTube video on how to grow a sophisticated-looking beard. This is Teton Valley Health Care CEO Keith Gnagey demonstrating what patients can expect through the hospital's new telemedicine program.

Telemedicine is the future, available today

By Jeannette Boner

In a medical emergency, minutes, even seconds, count when seeking the best treatment possible for a patient. And in rural areas such as Teton Valley, those minutes can feel like hours considering our unique challenges with landscape, weather and distance.

Teton Valley Health Care continues to seek out medical relationships with regional hospitals and universities and this week announced a partnership with the University of Utah's Health Care facility to provide more telemedicine to patrons in an ongoing effort to address our unique challenges.

To be clear, this is not a doctor-robot.

A team from the university was on hand Monday afternoon introducing medical staff to the program that will provide specialized medical care for those suffering from stroke, burn and for adolescents in need of psychiatric care. Currently, Teton Valley Health Care is working with Portneuf Medical Center in Pocatello to provide telepsychology for adult patients.

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This type of service, said CEO Keith
Gnagey not only cuts diagnoses rates down,
but provides a level of speciality that is
a welcomed compliment to the overall
services provided at Teton Valley Health

Care.

"This is a great way to meet community needs," said Gnagey on Monday. "These are all areas where patients would have to travel to receive more specialized care or follow up care. Now that can happen here," he said.

While teleburn medicine is a rare need for the hospital, Director of Public Relations Ann Loyola said that stroke and mental health needs have been identified as one of the top concerns and community care needs through their recently released Community Health Assessment.

Nate Gladwell, director of telemedicine for the University of Utah said Monday," At the end of the day, telemedicine is medicine."

Gladwell said that when local doctors make the call to the University, it's a five to ten minute turnaround regardless of the time of day or night and a medical professional will be face to face with a patent, their family and the local medical team. Especially with a stoke, time is of the essence. A patent could be suffering from an acute migraine said Gladwell, but having a specialist assess a patient for possible stoke and being able to administer the appropriate drug sooner is critical to the patients overall well being.

"The challenge with stroke," said Gladwell, "is time. All studies show early intervention is key."

The University is currently partnering with five other western states including Idaho through its telemedicine program.

"They've always been a referral partner,' said Gnagey of the University. "With complex cases, you need specialty care and this is the cutting edge. We want to have someone who sees ten strokes a week and in real time. You want that level of comfort

when you are being cared for."

Gnagey said that the next step in telemedicine is equipping ambulances with telemedicine machines. Currently, the cities of Driggs and Victor are the only communities wired for 4G technology. Gnagey said he will have to wait until Teton Valley catches up with technology to install the telemedicine technology in ambulances.