New COVID-19 virtual visit curbside testing site now open

As the COVID-19 positivity rate continues to fluctuate within our community, MercyOne recognizes the need to provide more convenient testing options for patients.

On Dec. 7, MercyOne Central Iowa Medical Group opened a virtual visit testing location, allowing both adult and pediatric, non-symptomatic patients to be referred to a COVID-19 testing site through a virtual visit with their provider.

If needed, providers now have the ability to send patients for testing at MercyOne’s convenient curbside testing site, located in the MercyOne Norwalk Family Medicine Clinic parking lot. The virtual platform is for individuals with mild or no symptoms who need a quick and easy testing option. Additional options are available for patients who are showing symptoms, which may include getting tested at the nearest family medicine or urgent care clinic.

Multiple sclerosis day program resumes virtually

Together, MercyOne Des Moines Riverside Rehabilitation and MercyOne Ruan Neurology Care offer a group day program for consumers living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Due to COVID-19, the program had been temporarily suspended, but is being resumed virtually.

With this program, offered at no cost, the group meets once a week for 12 weeks. Each week, consumers meet with a nurse educator, speech therapist, occupational therapist and physical therapist. A typical day includes a form of exercise, creating art or music, enhancing cognitive/communication skills, and education on strategies for managing symptoms of MS, along with how to connect to resources.

MercyOne Central Iowa is the only health care organization to offer this program in the state of Iowa, thanks to our generous sponsors Annie’s Ride, the MARS Foundation and the MercyOne Des Moines Foundation. It is the goal of Riverside Rehabilitation and Ruan Neurology to improve quality of life and support social engagement.

The next session begins Wednesday, Jan. 13, at 10 a.m., with weekly meetings each following Wednesday from 10 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sticky Scenario: “To text or not to text”

Physician Jennifer frequently asks nurse Monique to text patient status reports to her. Monique does so using her personal phone, but she is concerned this may violate patient privacy. What should Monique do?

Monique is correct that using her personal, unencrypted phone to transmit electronic protected health information (ePHI) creates both privacy and security issues. She should contact Central Region Information Technology and Cybersecurity leadership about using a secure texting system. Monique should not text ePHI on her personal phone.

The use of standard text messaging using a pager, mobile phone, tablet, desktop/laptop application or other device to send ePHI does not comply with HIPAA. Doing so sends the text message over a cellular network or the internet in an unencrypted format, without authentication of the sender or receiver of the message and without the ability to audit or monitor the contents of the message.

Because of this, text messages containing ePHI should not – except in emergent clinical situations – be sent from, or sent to, an unencrypted standard text messaging device. Patient information, however, may be transmitted by text if using a secure, approved texting solution.

The following information not containing ePHI may be sent via a standard text messaging device:

- Request for an update
- General data (e.g., time of a provider’s first appointment or the number of patients on their schedule)
- Workflow messages involving staffing

Clinician orders/directives (e.g., prescription order or care protocol) should never be sent via electronic mobile messaging.

For additional information, see “Secure Messaging of Health Information,” available on the Integrity and Compliance community on the MercyOne Central Iowa intranet under “Policies, Forms and Job Aids.”

NOTICE: Please do not use the CommonSpirit hotline to make reports. Use the MercyOne hotline: 1-866-477-4661 or MyComplianceReport.com (access ID: THO). Thank you!