

TeleMental Health Case Study:

**River Edge Behavioral Health Center**



## River Edge Behavioral Health Center: A Technology-Based Hub-and-Spokes Approach to Treatment

Submitted by [Leslie McElligott](#) on Friday, July 19, 2013 - 4:59pm.

On a recent night, a young man entered a 24-hour crisis service site operated by River Edge Behavioral Health Center in Macon, Georgia. He was tremulous. His palms were sweaty. He clearly needed medical detoxification services but refused help. What to do?

The staff person on duty called Shannon Harvey, River Edge's CEO. Shannon holds State credentials that empower her to commit someone to involuntary detox. From her home, 70 miles away, Shannon opened her laptop, logged into the telehealth application, evaluated the man, and had him committed to involuntary detox. With a blood alcohol level of .459, he likely would have died that night without treatment. After detox, the man was transferred to a rehab program and is now working toward recovery.

River Edge—in partnership with ViewPoint Health—has adopted a hub-and-spokes telemedicine approach to extend the reach of this 63-year-old provider agency. Since its launch, the program has successfully promoted access to recovery for people across 15 locations, mostly rural, throughout Georgia.

Shannon credits Ali Yallah, the grant's project director and a credentialed IT professional, with River Edge's "entrepreneurial, forward-thinking, and solution-focused approach." Ali's expertise helped River Edge choose **VeaMea (now swyMed), a low-cost, easy-to-use, secure application, as their telehealth solution.** Now, clinical staff routinely consult remotely to provide diagnosis and intervention services to clients. With a laptop, Internet connection, and Webcam, a clinician can assess and treat a client from practically anywhere.

River Edge has adopted several other technology-based strategies to serve its clients. For example, its Smoke Signal system provides digital telephonic reminders to clients about upcoming appointments. Rolled out in 2013, Smoke Signal has already reduced client appointment no-show rates by 12 percent.

River Edge has incorporated computer labs at each site to help clients cross "the digital divide." With staff assistance, clients can use self-paced goal-setting and tracking software. They can also learn to build resumes and connect with employment services. The availability of onsite technology is transforming lives. For example, one client had lost everything as a result of alcoholism. After receiving services and getting sober, she began believing in herself again. She got her GED and learned new computer skills, including Photoshop. She now publishes a magazine.

River Edge's iCareRecovery Web portal promises to be "the Facebook for recovery." Upcoming enhancements include chat features, blogs, and peer support services for clients when a counselor is unavailable.

Shannon and Ali are passionate about technology. As Shannon says, "We believe treatment is effective, recovery is to be expected, technology is treatment, and technology is health care."

## Comments



**MARCIA METH**

**Post date:** Monday, July 22, 2013 - 2:58pm

Another cool fact gleaned during my interview with the River Edge folks: In FY2008/09, only 2 people were seen via telemedicine; in FY2012/13, 516 unduplicated clients accessed the agency's telecare services. Shannon attributes that big jump to Veamea--a low-cost, easy-to-use, secure Microsoft application. She calls it "a game changer."

[reply](#) [Flag as Inappropriate](#) [Like](#)



Welcome, Ali Yallah | [Need Help?](#) | [Logout](#)

[Search](#)

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [DISCOVER](#) [LEARN](#) [CONNECT](#) [MANAGE YOUR GRANT](#) [MY IE](#)



[Post an Event](#) [Share a Resource](#) [Start a Discussion](#)

[Home](#) » [Discover](#) » [River Edge To Present at the 2014 American Telemedicine Conference](#)

## River Edge To Present at the 2014 American Telemedicine Conference

River Edge Behavioral Health Center—a comprehensive community-based provider of treatment and prevention services in Macon, Georgia—was recently selected to give a presentation about its innovative use of technology-assisted care at the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) conference and tradeshow in Baltimore, Maryland, May 17– 20, 2014.

The Targeted Capacity Expansion Technology-Assisted Care (TCE-TAC) grant awarded by SAMHSA in September 2012 has enabled River Edge to implement a robust, cost-effective, user-friendly, and portable telemedicine application. River Edge plans to demonstrate at the ATA conference how the use of telemedicine technology has helped to bridge service gaps between health care professionals and clients living in suburban and rural communities in Georgia. Specifically, the technology has improved client access to care, enhanced clinical outcomes, increased staff retention, and lowered operating costs. Since 2010, the number of unduplicated clients who have received telemedicine services has grown from 2 to 516, with exponential growth expected going forward.

River Edge's TCE-TAC project director Ali Yallah said he is honored to be chosen by industry peers to present the telehealth platform at ATA. "ATA is the world's premiere gathering of health care technology solutions," said Ali. "We are hopeful the review of the key elements contributing to our program's success and the return on SAMHSA's health information technology investment will prove beneficial to attendees."

The ATA conference is the world's largest event of its kind. River Edge is looking forward to showcasing its success and learning from others. "We are hopeful that recognition as a leader in behavioral health technology will open opportunities to enhance technology solutions that will promote stigma reduction, recovery, and resilience in the communities we serve," said Ali.



## Just the Facts...TeleMental Health Services

- Between October 1, 2006, through September 30, 2010, a total of 98,609 patients were newly enrolled in VA telemental health services throughout the United States.
- During that time, VA psychiatric hospital admissions decreased 24.2%
- During that time, the number of hospitalization days decreased 26.6%

Source: Godleski, Linda, Adam Darkins, and John Peters. "[Outcomes of 98,609 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Patients Enrolled in Telemental Health Services, 2006–2010.](#)" *Psychiatric Services* 63.4 (2012): 383-385. Web.

- In FY2013, VA delivered telemental health services through 278,000 patient encounters to over 91,000 patients
- The VA has seen a 22% annual growth in overall telehealth services, and roughly 35% reduction in readmissions in their telehealth enrollees.

Source: Bresnick, Jennifer. "[VA Reduces Admissions by 35% due to Telemedicine Services.](#)" *EHR Intelligence*. Xtelligent Media, LLC. Web.

- As of 2009, it is estimated that 77% of counties in the US have a severe psychiatrist shortage
- Based on patient satisfaction and symptom improvement, telepsychiatry has provided a level of care comparable with care as usual.
- Medicare has been adding billing codes specific to telepsychiatry.

Source: Rebecca A. Kornbluh *Staying true to the mission: adapting telepsychiatry to a new environment*. *CNS Spectrums*, Available on CJO 2014 doi:10.1017/S1092852914000017

According to a study by IHS Technology and published in January, the almost 350,000 telehealth patients in 2013 will swell to 7,000,000 by 2018.

Source: Roashan, Roegen. "[Telehealth Report - 2014: a Dedicated Study on Telehealth That Provides Detailed Analysis of the World Market.](#)" IHS (2014): Web.

To learn more, or discuss implementing  
TeleMedicine in your organization,  
visit us at:

<http://swymedical.swyme.com>