

Policy and Procedure

Regarding After-Hours Coverage

I. Background

Patients can access health center providers to address routine, urgent, and emergent needs after normal business hours through the health center's after-hours coverage system. The ability of patients to have access to clinical advice when the health center is closed reduces use of the emergency room, promotes continuity of care, and fosters patient-centeredness.

II. Policy

It is the policy of NEPA Community Health Care to provide adequate after-hours coverage provisions for all NEPA CHC patients.

III. Procedure

- A. Patient access to after-hours coverage is communicated via the *New Patient Welcome Letter* and posted signs in each clinic's waiting area.
- B. After-hours coverage is provided by a team of NEPA CHC clinicians, comprised of primary care MDs and CRNPs.
- C. NEPA CHC coordinates with a contracted answering service for efficient telephone processing of patient calls after the designated clinic operating hours.
- D. The Revenue Cycle Manager is responsible for creating and maintaining the after-hours coverage schedule for providers and for ensuring the contracted vendor has the current schedule, as well as, up to date contact information for each provider.
 - a. After-hours, on-call provider schedule is created within the contracted vendor's web-based tool. www.mytelemed.com
 - b. On-call schedules will be created at least 1 month in advance.
 - c. Coverage periods will run from Monday thru Sunday, with each provider on-call for 1 week per rotation. Rotation will be a continuous cycle between the team of on-call clinicians.
 - d. If a provider is unable to cover his/her scheduled week, the next provider in rotation will be notified and those weeks will be switched, respectively.
 - e. Upon completion, the schedule is saved, printed, and distributed to providers, front desk staff, and administration.
- E. At all times when the health center is closed phone lines are transferred to a contracted answering service vendor.
 - a. When patients call the center after the usual operating hours they will hear a recording that informs them:

- i. Of the usual clinic operating hours
 - ii. To call 911 for a medical emergency
 - iii. To hold on the line to speak with the answering service
 - b. Once a patient is connected to the answering service, the operator on duty will:
 - i. Inform callers who want to schedule or cancel appointments to call back during normal operating hours.
 - ii. Inform callers requesting a medication refill to call back during normal operating hours.
 - iii. Direct life-threatening emergency situations to 911 or the nearest emergency room
 - iv. Direct mental health emergencies to the Susquehanna County Crisis Line, 570-278-6822.
 - v. All other calls are transferred to the on-call provider. The answering service will:
 - 1. Obtain the caller's name, patient's full name, patient's date of birth, primary care provider's name, and reason for the call.
 - 2. Inform the caller that the on-call provider will return their call to the number provided within 10 minutes.
 - 3. Text the on-call provider via the MyTelemed app.
 - 4. Provider will call Telemed to be connected with the patient.
 - c. All calls received by the answering service are documented within the Mytelemed.com system and shared with center staff for follow-up and auditing purposes.
 - d. The answering service calls the on-call provider continuously until the provider is reached.
 - e. The answering service provides Spanish, French, and English speaking operators. The answering service also provides accommodations to hard-of-hearing patients via a TTY system.
- F. On-call providers will manage patient concerns on the basis of clinical judgment based on the patient's reported problems.
 - a. This may include recommendations and direct medical advice to the patient or family members and recommendations on follow-up care, if needed.
 - b. On-call providers will follow the health center's HIPAA standards while on call.
 - c. On-call providers will not provide prescriptions or refills of controlled substances to patients while on-call. In accordance with NEPA CHC's *Safe Prescribing of Controlled Substances* policy, the on-call provider will instruct patient to schedule an appointment to be seen with his/her primary care provider. For acute situations, patient will be referred to the local emergency room.
- G. On-call providers will comply with the following responsibilities:
 - a. Carry phone with MyTelemed app at all times after clinic hours.

- b. Maintain access to the health center's EMR via a secure VPN network managed by our IT group.
 - c. Respond to MyTelemed text messages within 10 minutes of receipt. If the provider does not respond to a text within that time period, the answering service will repeat the text.
 - d. Document each after-hours call within the patient's electronic medical record by creating a non-billable encounter note.
- H. Front Desk Staff are provided with access to the documented messages on MyTelemed.com and will check these messages every morning at the start of the business day.
- a. Front Desk Staff will return any calls pertaining to scheduling.
 - b. Front Desk Staff will forward messages regarding medication refills by triage to the nursing staff.