

# Improving depression in nursing home rehab patients through telemedicine

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A new pilot study is getting underway in Rhode Island aimed at improving depression in nursing home rehabilitation patients, all through telemedicine. Geriatric mental health specialists from Rhode Island and The Miriam hospitals will work with patients in the Evergreen House Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center in East Providence to test the program.

Thomas Sheeran, Ph.D., M.E., a [clinical psychologist](#) in the department of psychiatry at Rhode Island Hospital, is the principal investigator on the study. Sheeran says, "Depression is very common in nursing home patients, and there are not enough geriatric [mental health](#) professionals to provide services. We need to find creative ways to better help these individuals."

Through a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, the two hospitals and nursing facility have partnered with Breakthrough, a technology company based in Palo Alto, Calif., that connects mental [health professionals](#) with clients via secure video, email and chat. Sheeran explains, "Videoconferencing technology has traditionally been very expensive, but today's internet-based platforms are increasingly providing high-quality and secure connections. Telemedicine allows [mental health professionals](#) to reach more people than they otherwise could, especially among seniors who may have mobility challenges."

Breakthrough CEO Mark Goldenson says, "We are thrilled to help Rhode Island Hospital, The Miriam Hospital and Evergreen House

improve care for their elderly patients. Telebehavioral care is accessible, private, and lets providers help patients from almost anywhere."

Evergreen House Medical Director Allen Dennison, M.D., states, "Evergreen House is a community of supportive and personalized care, and we are very excited to be a community partner in this project to improve the quality of life for our residents."

Sheeran and his colleagues began the pilot project in November and will report the results in the summer of 2012. If successful, the researchers hope to expand the program to more nursing homes and to conduct a full randomized trial to test the effectiveness of the intervention.

Provided by Lifespan

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