

### Audio Transcription

Season /Episode #:	Season 1 Episode 4
Guest:	Dr. Pearl Korenblit, Jamie Hammitt, RN and Susan Dicks, RN
Title:	Telework best practices

Doctor Maia Carter	Hello, my name is Doctor Maia Carter, and welcome to Let's Talk Virtual Care podcast episode for doctor Pearl Korenblit registered nurses Jamie Hammitt and Susan Dicks discuss telework best practices. Each episode unpacks key approaches for operationalizing virtual care from exceptional VA staff and health care innovators. You will gain valuable, timely insights for the mobilization of virtual tools for veteran health and well-being.
Doctor Maia Carter	This blog was produced by the Office of Primary Care Virtual Care Integration Team. Doctor Pearl Korenblit is a board-certified internal medicine and preventive medicine physician, and she's ACOS of Ambulatory Care at the new Jersey Health Care System. Susan Dicks is currently assistant nurse manager at Office of Connected Care, and she's formerly nursing supervisor at the Springfield CBOC.
Doctor Maia Carter	And that's in the Ileana health care system. Jamie Hammitt as a front line CBOC nurse at the Springfield CBOC. So welcome. So glad that you all could join us today. Also, I forgot to mention Doctor Korenblit, she's also the VISN 2, ICC Primary Care lead, so thank you for leading the VISN 2, for Primary Care.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	Thank you!
Doctor Maia Carter	I'm so thrilled about this topic today of telework. Our Undersecretary of Health, Doctor Elnahal, spoke about telework just recently, and he describes it as a survival tool. And he also speaks to the importance of encouraging flexibility with our workforce so we could retain staff and continue to take great care of our veterans. So, let's jump in. Doctor Korenblit, let's start with you.
Doctor Maia Carter	So why is telework so important?
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	So we just find that when we offer telework, even in a limited fashion, like one day we talk to our providers especially, and it reduces burnout. It just really improves, their experience at work. And that affects the veteran as well. It offers the ability to doVVC so our veterans have a choice.

Doctor Pearl Korenblit	Retention is, you know, we want to not only hire good quality people, but we want to be able to retain them. There's no question that when we offer them that option, then we then we are competitive with the others VAs and competitive with the with the community. And we retain our staff. And as well, primary care providers have a lot of asynchronous work.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	and to be able to do it from home with no interruptions is an incredible experience.
Doctor Maia Carter	Nice. I hear you. So, it sounds like in order to be competitive, in order to create an environment that works with our staff, makes sense. So, Susan, tell us how this came about at the Springfield CBOC?
Susan Dicks	Well, I was approached by, two of my pack, RN's, Jamie Hammitt and Cindy Venable. with the idea due to, Springfield Clinic is outgrowing and very tight. There was three RN's in one room, and the rooms were very small for privacy for VVC's, and we really needed to increase our sales.
Doctor Maia Carter	Got it. So did you, set any ground rules or any structure around this telework pilot that you launched?
Susan Dicks	Yeah, we set up a meeting with our chief of nursing, for Ambulatory Care, and we come up with the ground rules of. We had five teams in Springfield in that there must be three rooms at all times, that they would try to work two days a week and three, days. That had to be in the clinic for about six months.
Susan Dicks	They had to always have their calendars, outlook and teams available and phone available that they could be response. And also, we had stream fax for them to do their alerts and that with, and anytime they called in on a day that they were to be in the office, they could not convert it to telework.
Doctor Maia Carter	Got it. I like how you have that clear structure in place to kind of really give people some sense of, structure and doing something new and different. Now, Jamie, you're working on the front line. I'm so excited that you could join us. I want to hear from you. What was it like approaching your leadership with this idea of doing something differently?
Doctor Maia Carter	You presented your concern, and then they answered you. So, tell us a little bit about what that was like for you.

Jamie Hammitt	Initially, it was tough at first. Not because of one supervisor, one chief. It was not typical nursing. When you think of nursing, you think of bedside nursing, and you think of clinical nurse being not a nurse that's over a computer screen or that's over a television. You think of the touch. So, approaching, I had to come up with a game plan and have, set goals for us to be able to go.
Jamie Hammitt	But in Springfield, like Susan said, we are so tight. We have three RNs. We weren't able to do video connect because the RNN behind us could hear. And honestly, this has helped with sanity. It's helped with space. It's helped with, just compassion with the veterans.
Doctor Maia Carter	Awesome. Sounds like you had the courage to be able to really think about your situation, understand it wasn't optimal for patient care, for privacy issues, and you were able to kind of, have that conversation. So great job trailblazing that. So, Doctor Korenblit, tell us, how do you hold your staff accountable for telework? Sometimes as leaders, it's hard to be, to understand how that works when they're not sitting there in brick and mortar.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	that's what we try to do is for our providers, we try to do it the same day that they have a half day of administrative time, so that the expectation is that they fill eight appointments of VVC that morning. there's this fantastic report called a PACT profile report. It shows you that you can actually go down to the highest level and see how that needs to be utilized.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	It shows you future appointments. How many are video, how many are face to face the possibility? What percentage is video and face to face. And as well utilization of slots as well. We really, give our providers a lot of great opportunities to use the slots. All of the veterans who, airborne registry exams, for PACT, we actually make them one hour PACT appointments, you see appointments impact on those days.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	so that is a great use of it. We're now seeing this new project or transitioning veterans from Fort Hood will be followed virtually by New Jersey. And we're going to use these slots. We train them on how to look at all the different population health reports, how to read, how to identify outliers so they can follow up to video, whether it's diabetes of the diabetes measure, it's vaccines, it's monograms, pap smears.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	We just help them a lot and we really give them a lot of support. We ensure there are and the savings and horses, know how to detect calls. And as well, we, we really try to create a workflow that's really similar to one you're face to face. And one of the things that I think Jim said that really gave us a good

	idea to mention is that in some of our very distant CBOCs, by having providers a telework one day a week, we can bring specialists to the site, see that?
Doctor Maia Carter	Oh that's amazing. So many different pieces in there for accountability, right. The reports what are the key reports we need to look at to see utilization patterns, to understand population health and what patients we need to perhaps target first. What are the cases? Use scenarios like the Airborne Hazard Registry and other things that can be used for VBAC, making sure the grids are in place, and then the coaching and the encouragement and keeping folks, moving forward with virtual care.
Doctor Maia Carter	Great job. Wow, what an accomplishment. Strong work. Okay, so Susan, back to you. So, I understand that, you know, starting off with these two registered nurses, letting them trial this telework that's been expanded now to other nurses, other disciplines, other clinics. Right. So, I want to know just kind of what are some key elements that you think attribute to sustainability.
Susan Dicks	Well, the staff proved themselves, the two nurses. and so, we expanded it on to our other RNs within that clinic. And because of the increase of the VVCs, and it worked well with the alerts and the stream fax. So that went on to other nurse, other clinics, CBOCs with the nurses. And from that, they did a team's primary care teams that so they can increase VVCs and they've proven that's where slowly we have met our goals on our VVCs for our VISN.
Susan Dicks	and they found no interruptions. They can get more alerts done, with less interruptions. that.
Doctor Maia Carter	That sounds like that's a game changer. You know, I just, having worked in the clinic setting for so long, we're constantly getting interrupted, constantly being able to, you know, start one thing and then you're juggling so many different things at one time. And having a telework opportunity to really focus on the task at hand. seems like that is, a wellness game changer for staff.
Doctor Maia Carter	So that's a great. And it sounds like also, you may have implemented things like Dr. Korenblit had mentioned test calls and making sure, both staff and veterans were tee'd up and ready to go to have a successful VC visit, were that correct?
Susan Dicks	yes. And we're looking even further into having consults per test calls to help with the process for the providers and their patients to make it smoother.

Doctor Maia Carter	Fantastic. I know there are some strong practices out there for, VC test call consults. So wonderful. So, Jamie, what is it like now? Right. So, you had the courage. You had an idea. it. Awesome leadership who listened to you built on that idea. And what is life for you? Like now? Having the flexibility of telework versus before when you, you had, to come in for all the time for the clinic.
Jamie Hammitt	Working from home has actually given me time to take a breath and be in the moment with a veteran. I can also 100% say that I am in the conversation when I am at home, because I am not being interrupted. I am also a charge nurse here at the clinic, so I'm a resource and a bunch of people will come in for various situations, but working at home has given me my sanity back.
Jamie Hammitt	It's given me space. It's given privacy. As Susan has said, we've done VVCs. I try to do them while I'm at home so I can have the privacy. But most importantly, I can be in tune to the veteran.
Doctor Maia Carter	And that's what it's all about, right? Being able to take care of that person in front of you, really hear them honor what their, what their ideas are, what's important to them, and really feel good about the work that you're doing. Oh, I love that. That's great. And then lastly, I want to understand more about the organizational impact.
Doctor Maia Carter	So, I'm going to ask both Doctor Korenblit and Susan this question about the impact of the organization. What do you think telework, has done as far as, you know, making it a better organization, best places to work or anything like that. Any insights? doctor Korenblit, we'll start with you.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	When I look at the different areas in my department, there's no question that the best place, the best, best place to work, because our staff have the most telework and the most videos at home. And so, I think it's really it's important to retain our primary care providers. They're the backbone of our primary care clinics. It takes a really long time to recruit, and it's great for our veterans to have that continuity, that long term planning at the same providers.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	So, there's no question that retention is better. We're more competitive when we're out there looking for people and the best place to work. So, it's certainly part of our action plans for employee survey. I think as I think as, I think Jenny was saying, just about her own experience, that it just gives you peace and allows you to really practice mindfulness, be there 100% for your

	veterans and give the veterans an opportunity to be seen when they want to be seen, where they want to see.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	Like another example, I want to say that that really is great. Let's say a veteran walks in for an urgent visit and their provider is at home, doing telework with VVC. We offer them right then and there. A VVC visit, but they're better.
Doctor Maia Carter	Awesome.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	In wherever you wanted to see everyone. But there's no question that, just the quality of life. The All Employee Survey scores and just the retention and, and the good feeling about it, it really makes a big difference. And that is our goal. Our goal is to have happy staff, happy veterans, staying long.
Doctor Maia Carter	Love it. Awesome. Susan.
Susan Dicks	That two best place to work. So, the results we had seen an increase in results and work life balance for the staff. More satisfaction that way. So, it's been a big plus for us.
Doctor Maia Carter	Awesome. You know, that's what we strived at, you know, to continue to improve on the best places to work. We want our staff to be able to choose VA every day. And we're all driven to the mission of the VA and at the same time have lots of choices. And I know having gone through Covid, everyone's kind of re-examining different things and making sure we put our priorities in order and what's important and having a good working experience, makes a difference.
Doctor Maia Carter	So, kudos to you all for being trailblazers in this effort. And I am going to close with one of my favorite topics. It is called Joy. Joy is my favorite topic. And, what brings you joy? So, I believe that when you have joy and you do things that bring you joy, then you're better for yourself and those around you.
Doctor Maia Carter	So, I like music. I like live music. And I recently was able to listen to some live music and dance and have a good time. And that brings me joy. So, I would like to just kind of go around to the three of you and ask you, what brings you joy? So, Jamie, let's start with you. What brings you joy?

Jamie Hammitt	My dogs, they bring me joy and family. But I'm recently a brand-new grandma, so I can't wait to get my hands on him. Congratulations,
Doctor Maia Carter	Oh my goodness, so many exciting things. Yes. And then there's something about animals, right? That is just so therapeutic and peaceful. So yes. Love it. Susan, what about you?
Susan Dicks	Well, I like you. Music. I sing in the church choir, so singing and prayer helps me.
Doctor Maia Carter	Yes, I completely agree with you on that. And that to Korenblit.
Doctor Pearl Korenblit	My children, my grandchildren, yoga. And then when you're just doing your job and doing it the best you can, it's someone out of the bluesend you an email back saying, I love how much you care about veterans. I love so much. You put your heart into it. You were just being yourself. When you get that positive feedback from your staff, it just I printed out, I pasted on my bulletin board, and I look at you and it gives me joy.
Doctor Maia Carter	Yes, yes. And sometimes it comes at the best moments right where you're like, oh my gosh, can I keep going? And then you get that letter or that note or that email or that card and you're just like, okay, okay, what I'm doing is making a difference because there's so much that we do that no one sees, right?
Doctor Maia Carter	But we do it because it's the right thing to do. And so yeah, that keeps us doing, keeps us going. So great. Wonderful. Well, this has been a pleasure to have this conversation. I think this is much needed for, the field. And you gave us all some great insights into how to make telework work and our unit.
Doctor Maia Carter	So, thank you. And let's all stay connected. Thank you for joining us on this episode of Let's Talk Virtual Care. I hope that you found it inspiring, and value added as you work to integrate virtual tools into your workspace, we welcome your ideas, your thoughts, and your suggestions for future episodes. You can view this episode or look at prior episodes by looking at our MS Streams channel.
Doctor Maia Carter	Just search. Let's talk virtual care. Please share this blog with your friends and your colleagues. We look forward to seeing you on the next episode of Let's Talk Virtual Care. I'm Doctor Maia Carter and remember dare to be innovative.