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## VIRTUAL CARE: A POWERFUL SOLUTION TO COMBAT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN REMOTE JOB SITES

On call now Open 2

Canadian workers have traditionally relied on their primary care physicians and other public healthcare resources as a first line of defence against and treatment of physical illnesses. Today, more employees are also turning to these professionals to address mental health issues like anxiety, stress and depression — while two thirds of Canadians suffering avoid seeking treatment for mental health concerns at all.

This situation is especially challenging for workers in remote and rural job sites, which present numerous barriers to obtaining timely, structured mental healthcare. Employers and owners must contend with the potential fallout of this situation, including absenteeism, productivity losses and possible OHS risks. In fact, Canadian employers lose \$6.3 billion in productivity annually due to mental health-related absenteeism and presenteeism.

Fortunately, technology has delivered an ideal solution: virtual care.

### Why virtual care?

Platforms like Medisys On-Demand harness the power of wireless technology to open two-way communication, including text messaging and videoconferencing, between Canadians and mental healthcare professionals.

Consider these compelling reasons to incorporate a virtual care solution to support workers in safety-sensitive, rural and remote job sites such as oil rigs, construction sites, mines and quarries, and remote Northern communities:

### 1) Enabling access to mental health resources from any location

Virtual care platforms are an extremely efficient way to deliver mental healthcare. By eliminating the need for both parties to be in the same room for consultations, these solutions allow workers in remote/rural job sites to easily access the mental health resources they require — regardless of their location.

Virtual mental healthcare professionals are available 24/7. Workers can contact them whenever it's convenient, eliminating the need to take time off work or travel to a clinic for in-person consults.

### 2) Eliminating the stigma surrounding mental illness

Despite growing public awareness initiatives, there's still a great deal of misunderstanding and fear associated with mental illness. This perceived stigma prevents many people from seeking help; instead, they often suffer in silence, exacerbating their conditions and delaying treatment. Working in a remote/rural location also means being removed from family and support systems, which can lead to further isolation and stress.

Conducting mental wellness appointments via video or phone gives patients more control and privacy, and can help eliminate the fear of seeking help. Patients are therefore more likely to reach out to mental health resources through virtual care solutions than to book in-person appointments for the same issue.

### 3) Providing early, targeted support to patients

For people living with mental illness, it's crucial to obtain early support before episodes of depression, anxiety or stress worsen. Unfortunately, this is often difficult in remote/rural locations. Moreover, factors such as isolation from loved ones, harsh environmental conditions, long work shifts, and a lack of social connection can pose a serious threat to mental health.

Through virtual care solutions, workers can get the early support and help they need to prevent their symptoms from worsening and potentially affecting their work.

Virtual care also offers secure, private messaging and file-sharing between patients and practitioners. This is both a convenient way for patients to access resources between appointments, and also serves to strengthen the provider-patient relationship — a crucial element in supporting those living with mental illness.

### 4) Simplifying care with the power of technology

Traditional face-to-face mental health services are struggling to meet demand across the country. With over 96% of Canadians under the age of 45 already using the Internet every day, it makes sense to access counselling and mental health resources in this way. The only support required is a stable Internet connection, which many remote/rural job sites already have, and a wireless device.

For employers, addressing mental health issues in the workplace is crucial to maintaining a harmonious, productive and profitable job site. By leveraging the power of virtual care solutions like Medisys On-Demand, employers can help workers in rural/ remote job sites maintain — or regain — their mental wellness and thrive on the job.

<u>Click here</u> to learn more about how Medisys On-Demand can support your workplace mental wellness initiatives.





# PREVENTIVE EMPLOYEE HEALTH PROGRAMS

Modern healthcare options have made it easier than ever to keep employees healthy, reduce absenteeism and attract top talent. Designed specifically for safety-sensitive environments, these easy-to-implement programs return immediate benefits. Here are four of the top preventive employee health programs available today:

### .) 1. PRE-EMPLOYMENT TESTING

The workplace can pose dangers for people who are not physically or mentally prepared. Pre-employment testing allows employers to screen employees to ensure they're ready and able to carry out their required duties

• The Benefit: Hiring workers who present a higher risk of onthe-job injury increases absenteeism and the indirect costs associated with it. Pre-employment screening can prevent workplace incidents and accidents before they cause injury or loss of life, or generate excessive costs.

### ( 2. WELLNESS SERVICES

People who don't set aside time for exercise or self-care are sick more often and take more time off work than those who make wellness a priority. In fact, Canadian employees with as few as four lifestyle risk factors (such as obesity, sedentary lifestyle, high alcohol intake and smoking) take 50% more time off than their healthier counterparts.

While you can't mandate your employees to embrace a healthy lifestyle, you can encourage them to pursue healthier choices by incorporating an employee wellness program into your workplace.

• The Benefit: Employee wellness programs offer a multipronged approach. These often include nutritional planning, fitness programs and mental and physical risk assessments, which can increase the health of your workforce, decrease the use of sick days and improve employee retention when combined.

### 3. VIRTUAL HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Booking and attending a doctor's appointment is timeconsuming — especially when working in a remote location. With virtual care, employees can access healthcare professionals quickly and easily from their phone or tablet, at a time that's convenient for them.

• The Benefit: Virtual care gives employees a quick and simple option to see a doctor for themselves or their child, without requiring time off work. In a recent market survey, 47% of respondents said virtual care would help them take less time off work<sup>1</sup>. Simplifying access to medical professionals can also facilitate early diagnosis and treatment of health issues before they become severe.

### (👜) 4. JOB DEMAND ANALYSIS

A job demand analysis for safety-sensitive roles can protect employees and mitigate risk to organizations. During these analyses, an expert kinesiologist assesses each employee's workstation design, job design, equipment and tools, manual material handling, environmental factors, work organization, individual factors and more.

• The Benefit: Whether highly physical or rather sedentary, each occupation and role presents specific physical and ergonomic challenges like forceful exertions, awkward or static stances and high rates of repetitive movement, to name a few. A job demand analysis helps prevent occupational injury and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), which in turn decreases absenteeism and its related costs to employers.

Creating a positive workplace environment and a solid employeeemployer relationship is one of the best ways to ensure the health of your employees and protect your bottom line. Research suggests employees that enjoy a good relationship with their boss and a positive work environment take less time off and are more effective at their jobs.<sup>2</sup>



#### Sources

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## DEBUNKING 10 MYTHS ABOUT VIRTUAL CARE

Most employers recognize that common illnesses, mental health issues and chronic conditions (i.e. non-occupational health concerns) within their workforce can significantly affect their organization's productivity and bottom line. Virtual care can deliver practical, cost-effective employee health benefits to offset some of these concerns.

However, while virtual care has been widely adopted in Europe and Asia, it's still gaining traction in Canada. As a result, separating fact from fiction regarding this technology can be challenging.

We've rounded up 10 common myths about virtual care to help uncover the truth about this emerging Canadian healthcare model.

### MYTH 1: VIRTUAL CARE PROFESSIONALS CANNOT TREAT PATIENTS EFFECTIVELY.

A recent study<sup>1</sup> in British Columbia reported that 79% of patients who participated in a virtual medical visit believed the standard of care was equal to that of an in-person appointment. Moreover, 91% said the online visit helped them with their health issues.<sup>2</sup>

During a virtual consultation using Medisys On-Demand, in the unlikely event that the clinician is unable to provide optimal care, the patient will be referred either to the nearest clinic or to their family physician. If the clinician determines the patient's symptoms are severe or the situation is critical, the patient will be directed to the closest emergency room. In both cases, the clinician will contact patients within 48 hours for a follow-up to ensure their health is in good hands.

### MYTH 2: VIRTUAL CARE CAN ONLY TREAT PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERNS.

Scheduling challenges, lack of time and poor flexibility continue to make it difficult for Canadians to prioritize their mental and emotional health. Over 60% of people suffering from mental illness don't seek help due to the perceived or real stigma surrounding their condition.<sup>3</sup>

Virtual mental healthcare services can alleviate this fear through convenient, confidential mental health consultations — carried out anytime, anywhere, as soon as support is needed. What's more, new research suggests 90% of behavioural and mental health services can successfully be delivered virtually.<sup>4</sup>

There are numerous benefits to addressing mental health issues through virtual care:

- **Speed:** As time is crucial in dealing with most mental health concerns, patients can obtain rapid medical attention virtually, without having to wait for a clinic appointment and before their symptoms worsen.
- **Privacy:** Patientscanreceiveprivate health advice for sensitive issues from the comfort of their homes, alleviating the real or perceived stigma surrounding sitting in a waiting room to obtain care.
- Accessibility: With 60% of North American workers facing more mental health and substance abuse issues than they did two years ago<sup>5</sup>, putting mental wellness at our fingertips is a convenient modern solution for accessing these increasingly necessary services.

### MYTH 3: WITH VIRTUAL CARE, EMPLOYEES CAN EASILY FAKE SYMPTOMS TO GET SICK NOTES.

As with any doctor, it's possible for an employee to fake an illness in order to obtain a sick note. However, Medisys On-Demand employs experienced Canadian healthcare professionals who are as qualified as your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

Moreover, clinicians will only write sick notes (for a maximum of three days) if deemed medically necessary following a video consultation to confirm the patient's identity and health status. Our virtual care practitioners can also access patients' medical files and history for better diagnostic accuracy.

### MYTH 4: WITH VIRTUAL CONSULTATIONS, IT'S TOO EASY TO GET PRESCRIPTIONS FOR ANTIBIOTICS.

Virtual care clinicians are held to the same standard as practitioners in brick-and-mortar clinics. They are also aware of the over-prescription of antibiotics, and work to find the best solution for each patient. If the clinician believes a physical test is necessary to determine whether an infection is viral or bacterial, the patient will be referred for testing.

### MYTH 5: PERSONAL VIRTUAL CARE ACCOUNTS CAN EASILY BE SHARED WITH RELATIVES SO THEY CAN USE THE SERVICE.

Virtual care platforms take security and privacy seriously. Most platforms are secured, and with Medisys On-Demand, users are required to authenticate their accounts with picture ID. In order to write a prescription, clinicians require a video consult to confirm the patient's identity. With a Medisys On-Demand account, employees can invite family members to use the service; however, their partners must set up their own account and user authentication. Children over 14 can also have their own accounts, with consent. No personal information is shared within families to ensure each account holder can consult privately and address highly-personal issues.

### MYTH 6: VIRTUAL CARE IS ONLY USEFUL FOR BENIGN, COMMON HEALTH ISSUES LIKE COLDS.

Virtual care goes beyond treating common health issues. While some diagnostics, emergency care and disease management still require in-person assessments, many non-occupational health concerns can and are being successfully treated virtually — with no waiting, travel or time off work required. For many users, virtual care helps manage a variety of issues such as assessing non-occupational injuries, dealing with anxiety and depression, managing chronic conditions and other complex health problems.

## MYTH 7: VIRTUAL CARE DEVALUES THE DOCTOR/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP.

Medisys On-Demand and similar platforms are not meant to replace a family doctor or an occupational physician. In fact, information about virtual visits can be shared with other health professionals (with the patient's consent) to keep them updated on any changes to that person's health status.

Numerous studies have found that virtual care consults can successfully replace office visits in many situations, without compromising the quality of care and communication between patient and physician. The American Journal of Managed Care recently published a multi-year study revealing that 62% of responding patients reported the quality of virtual video visits was no different from that of office visits, and 68% of patients rated virtual video visits at a 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale.<sup>6</sup> Clinicians also overwhelmingly report virtual video visits are superior to office visits for timely scheduling of patient appointments and for visit efficiency.

### MYTH 8: PATIENTS WILL END UP SPEAKING TO A DOCTOR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, WHO DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEET CANADIAN STANDARDS.

While we can't guarantee the quality of care on all virtual care platforms, Medisys On-Demand only works with experienced Canadian physicians and registered nurses. Every time patients log in, they will speak with a clinician within their region, who follows and is governed by the same provincial regulations as the patient's own family physician.

### MYTH 9: USING A VIRTUAL CARE PLATFORM IS NOT SECURE.

Medisys On-Demand takes the security and confidentiality of your sensitive health information seriously. To maintain this confidentiality, health records and conversation history are fully encrypted and stored in an ISO 27001 and ISO 27018-certified data centre located in Canada. With these measures in place, 94% of patients reported confidence in the security and privacy of their personal information when using a virtual care service.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, every healthcare consultation remains fully confidential — just like appointments with a family doctor. Only the patient and the care team are allowed to access information in their medical records. We can share this information with primary care physicians if warranted, but only with the patient's consent.

### MYTH 10: WITH VIRTUAL CARE, IT'S POSSIBLE TO REUSE A DRUG PRESCRIPTION SEVERAL TIMES.

Although prescription medications are often necessary components of a therapeutic plan, they are sometimes used inappropriately. To combat this, each prescription written by a clinician over Medisys On-Demand is sent directly to the pharmacy of the patient's choice to be filled. This enables our healthcare professionals to track patients' use of this drug therapy, and detect potential misuse. Prescription renewals are only provided when medically necessary.

Interested in learning more about Medisys On-Demand? <u>Contact us</u> today!

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## Meet

# **ANDREA STOKES**

Registered Dietitian and Corporate Team Lead, Medisys Health Group



## QUESTION 1: TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK AT DEFINITIONS HEALTH AND WELLNESS, A DIVISION OF MEDISYS HEALTH GROUP.

I work as a registered dietitian. My role is to support a broad range of clients — individuals, executive health clients and corporate clients — as they work to improve their overall health and wellness through diet and other lifestyle changes.

That said, my largest client base is definitely corporate. I visit offices and other worksites to offer nutrition counselling, wellness presentations, menu audits and recipe demos — basically anything that helps employees make positive changes to what they eat and how they live! I also visit remote worksites, including offshore installations, to offer onsite nutrition services.

I'm also the corporate team lead for the St. John's clinic. I develop, organize and deliver overall health and wellness programming for our corporate clients here in Newfoundland, as well as throughout the country.

#### QUESTION 2: YOU'RE ONE OF THE FEW REGISTERED DIETICIANS TO WORK OFFSHORE. TELL US ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE.

Working in the offshore environment is one of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of my job. I support offshore workers by providing individual nutrition guidance and group presentations on various nutrition and wellness topics. I also meet with food service staff to identify feasible solutions to improve the nutritional quality of their food offerings. Workers in remote locations face very unique nutrition and wellness challenges. Eating well and exercising regularly are notoriously difficult to achieve and maintain onshore; this difficulty is often amplified in the offshore setting. To truly understand how to tailor effective recommendations for these clients' needs, it's essential that you experience this environment for yourself.

## QUESTION 3: WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO WORK IN HEALTH?

Growing up, my role model was my grandmother. She was active and social, volunteered regularly and ate a nutritious and enjoyable diet. She believed that how you treat your body impacts your health and wellbeing. At 91 years of age, she's still my inspiration!

I've always been fascinated with the idea of using food as medicine, particularly in preventing disease. My philosophy is not to strive for perfection, but rather for small but valuable improvements. This is especially true of diet and nutrition, where making healthy changes can be difficult. Understanding why people struggle with seemingly basic recommendations is an interesting and vital part of my work.

### QUESTION 4: HOW DID YOU ACHIEVE YOUR CURRENT POSITION?

After completing university and my internship, I worked in private practice for a couple of years. In 2014, I joined the Definitions/Medisys Health Group team as the sole dietitian at our Newfoundland and Labrador clinic. Having spent so much time in the corporate setting, I took on the additional role of Corporate Team Lead. This allows me to develop unique wellness programs to meet our corporate and offshore clients' needs, along with services such as ergonomics, nutrition and fitness counselling, wellness seminars, fitness and personal training, job safety analysis, injury prevention programs, health and wellness challenges and more.

### QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE YOUR CLIENTS' MAIN CHALLENGES?

My clients come from a huge variety of different ages and backgrounds, so they face an equally wide range of nutrition and health concerns. The most common include weight management, chronic disease management (especially diabetes and heart disease), digestive issues and meal planning.

Their biggest challenge is often a lack of time for healthy eating. Many clients just don't have time to cook from scratch and meal prep for the week, so I help them develop strategies to fit healthy eating into their busy lifestyles. Healthy eating doesn't need to be time-consuming. They just need to figure out how to make it work for them.

## QUESTION 6: HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR INDUSTRY EVOLVING IN THE FUTURE?

I see a continuation of consumers' growing awareness and desire for access to healthy foods and products, and their concern over the nutritional quality of the food we're putting into our bodies. The average person is becoming more knowledgeable of what it means to be healthy; in turn, this is reflected in food trends and in how the food industry is responding. For example, there's a push towards more whole, organic, minimally processed foods, as well as more plant-based proteins.

Moreover, as nutrition science continues to progress, our recommendations will become more specific and individualized. The concept of nutrigenomics — how our genetic makeup influences and interacts with nutrition — will become a useful tool in disease prevention and management, and will enable people to optimize health throughout their lifespan by making more informed food choices.

In fact, Medisys already offers genetic testing known as Nutrigenomix<sup>®</sup>. This test evaluates multiple nutrition and health factors and risks, including nutrient metabolism, cardiometabolic health, food intolerances, eating habits, weight management and physical activity. To learn more about Nutrigenomix<sup>®</sup>, <u>click here.</u>



## ANDREA'S TOP THREE NUTRITION TIPS

Eating healthy doesn't always come easy, and nutritional science can be extremely confusing and even contradictory. Here are three practical, concrete tips to help you on the road to better nutrition.

#### **1. EAT REAL FOODS MORE OFTEN.**

By "real" foods, I mean natural foods like fruit, vegetables, fish, meat and poultry, nuts and seeds, beans, and minimally-processed grains, which have been part of the human diet for most of our existence. Real foods should make up at least 80% of your overall diet; this still leaves room for treats and convenience foods when you really need or want them.

### 2. FOCUS ON MAKING SMALL CHANGES OVER TIME.

A drastic diet overhaul or long list of changes can be overwhelming and discouraging. Pick one or two small changes from your list, commit to them until they become habits, then move on to other small changes. Over time, you'll made significant progress – and besides, one small change that lasts a lifetime is more beneficial than a complete diet change that only lasts two weeks.

### 3. SET GOALS THAT WORK FOR YOU.

People's goals, concerns, challenges, and life circumstances are constantly changing, so it stands to reason that two people will rarely respond to nutrition and health changes in the exact same way. Be realistic, and understand that some lifestyle changes or goals might be too difficult – at least for now. If you're struggling, simply set those changes aside and try something else. You can always revisit these goals later, when they're more feasible.

In these situations, meeting with a dietitian can truly benefit you. We take the time to get to know the intricacies of your life and then help you set goals that are both beneficial and achievable. We aim for "just a little bit better" and then build on this base over time. <u>*Click here*</u> to learn more or to book an appointment with me.

# In The News INDUSTRY UPDATE

# WHAT'S TRENDING IN THE OS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH INDUSTRY?

### 1. Canadians ready for healthcare to modernize

The Canadian Medical Association released a report on the future of connected healthcare, suggesting that the country's healthcare system needs to modernize to keep pace with technology. To read more, *click here*.

### 2. Exoskeletons are reducing ergonomic injuries

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are among the most common and painful of occupational injuries. A new and innovative technology may be just the solution. The exoskeleton, a rigid structure worn on the outside of the body, has been proven to reduce the physical stresses that cause MSDs. To learn more, <u>click here.</u>

### 3. Newfoundland's workplace fatalities increasing

Newfoundland and Labrador's lost-time incidence rate due to workplace injury or illness in 2018 was 1.6 per 100 workers, up slightly from 1.5 the previous year. Almost two-thirds of the occupational disease-related fatalities are due to exposure to harmful substances decades ago in the mining industry. To learn more, <u>click here.</u>

### 4. RNAO releases best practice guideline to combat violence

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) has released a best practice guideline to combat a surge in violence that in 2015 made health workers twice as likely as police and correctional officers combined to be injured badly enough to miss time from work. To learn more, <u>click here.</u>

### 5. New advisory committee to promote skilled trades

A new advisory committee will lay the groundwork for a national campaign to encourage apprenticeships and promote the skilled trades as a career of choice. It will also lead consultations, explore partnerships and provide advice to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. To learn more, <u>click here.</u>



## IS VIRTUAL CARE THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS?



### The Medisys Health Group 2019 Virtual Healthcare Industry Report is Available Now – <u>click here</u> to download.

### Did you know that 71% of Canadian employees seek virtual healthcare?

The 2019 virtual care industry report examines:

- Employee attitudes toward virtual care in Canada
- How virtual care impacts mental health in the workplace
- The ROI of virtual care for employers
- Barriers to virtual care adoption

