

Coronavirus and the VA

Some times it is good to be lucky. My last week's column was about using the VA's telemedicine for my annual checkup. Now that we are in the midst of a health crisis called the Coronavirus, using some current technology will help you and the VA manage your health. The VA's website has new information on the Coronavirus and what Veterans should do. If you have flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath, the VA requests that you call your local VA hospital before visiting. The VA also recommends that Veterans consider using telehealth or My HealtheVet secure messaging. Telehealth is similar to what I described last week. It worked really well. Telehealth has several components. One option supported by the VA is remote patient monitoring. If deemed appropriate, the VA will provide a device along with user training, assign you a care coordinator and can assess your health and vital signs remotely. This must be pre-approved, of course. A second option is video appointments. To me this seems to be a great option for those who might have a contagious disease and should not be out in the public. With VA Video Connect, Veterans can meet providers in virtual medical rooms using the camera on a smartphone, computer or tablet. This will also allow family members and caregivers to participate in the appointment. Smartphones, tablets and laptop computers have the necessary speaker and mic to work. If you are using a desktop computer, it must have a camera, mic and speakers attached. You'll also need Internet access. Again, it must be scheduled. The third option is secure messaging, something I've used for years. You must have a computer, smartphone or tablet and Internet access to use it. Secure messaging is a non-urgent, non-emergency way of asking health related questions, update the VA with your health condition, request medication refills, manage VA appointments and ask routine questions. In my experience using secure messaging, I get a response within 24 hours. Remember this is a non-emergency option.

The VA has activated its emergency management coordination cell, according to their website and is implementing an aggressive and collaborative public health response to protect and care for Veterans. As with all hospitals, if you are not feeling well, please consider postpone visiting patients in the VA hospitals.

The VA recommendations on precautions to take are similar to what you hear on the news. Those are wash you hands often, use an 60 percent alcohol-based hand sanitizer, avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay home if you are sick or becoming sick. It appears that 'older adults' are more susceptible to the Coronavirus. What does that mean? The CDC reports that about 70 percent of the cases occur among those 65 years and older.

As with the flu and other diseases, please use good health techniques and common sense. Regarding the run on toilet paper, I can find no logical reason for it. Apparently it is mass hysteria.