

Ken Mills, MBA, BSN, RN, CNML

Director of Virtual Care and Digital Health

1. Tell us about your role as a Director of Virtual Care and Digital Health at Kootenai.

I execute virtual care and digital health strategies by establishing and operationalizing virtual care and digital health programs aimed at improving clinical and operational efficiency and effectiveness. This work leads to improvements in quality, patient experience, value, and caregiver well-being.

2. How long have you been with Kootenai Health and/or in healthcare?

2023 marks my 28th year at Kootenai Health. I'm fortunate to have reached many milestones with Kootenai Health over my career that help give me a well-rounded and specialized knowledge of what matters to patients and providers. I've helped create/implement:

- PETS department
- Inpatient Wound Care
- VAT team
- Transfer Center
- PSA role
- 24/7 Flex Nurse
- Bed Management System
- Throughput redesign
- GetWell network
- Mobile Nurse call
- Kronos
- 24/7 Staffing Office

3. Why is virtual care the future of healthcare?

Virtual care is the natural evolution of our culture that relies on technology to bridge gaps over traditional methods. Virtual care is not a stand-alone process for providing care to a patient, but a hybrid process of traditional medicine. Consumers want choices in their medical care and virtual care allows a level of convenience with their local providers as well as opportunities to see specialists they may not otherwise be able to see due to travel/scheduling challenges. Virtual care also allows innovations in delivering care differently from traditional models, like remote patient monitoring, hospital at home, and virtual nursing, to name a few.

4. Why is virtual care particularly important to those in rural communities?

Virtual care in rural communities allows access to care that was difficult in the past. Many rural areas have little to no specialty care and require the patient to travel to the nearest specialty provider. This would delay care to the patient as well as create travel challenges and expenses. Virtual care also allows patient in rural areas choices with their providers. Instead of accepting the only provider in the local communities, they have a wider field to choose from. Virtual care has the most opportunity for growth in rural communities by allowing new and innovative delivery care models that have not been available to them in the past.

5. What can patients expect during their virtual care experience?

Virtual care should deliver the same high level of care that it's traditional counterpart has today. If a virtual office visit is occurring, it is important that the clinic provide a similar experience that the patient would have with an in person visit.