

A little bit of FaceTime goes a long way in recovery for Bella Coola family

Jeremy Deutsch

Communications Specialist

January 28, 2020



The last few months haven't been easy for Samantha Mack-Moody and her mom Leah Mack.

Samantha needed emergency surgery late last fall in Williams Lake that uncovered a case of undiagnosed diverticulitis, an inflammation in the intestines that can lead to a bowel perforation typically seen in older people.

But at the youthful age of 27, the Bella Coola resident was facing a six-month recovery that left her with an open wound and a colostomy pouch.

Following a couple weeks in hospital, she was sent home to Bella Coola in early December with supplies to attach to her stoma, an opening on the abdomen where her ostomy pouch attaches.

Samantha and her mom struggled on their own to handle the wound care and pouch changes. She had trouble with leakage around the pouch and skin breakdown around the stoma.

"It's been hectic, waking up knowing you have a colostomy bag and going back to a remote place that doesn't have that kind of help," she said.

But the stress of her recovery would soon change for the better thanks to some creativity and a little piece of technology we all take for granted.

Without a specialist in the community, Samantha and her mom were brought into the clinic in Bella Coola where the family was introduced to Rosemary Hill, the NSWOCC, or the Nurse Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence, based out of Lions Gate Hospital, using FaceTime on their iPhones.

Though they were hundreds of kilometres apart, Hill was able to use her phone to see and measure the stoma and get the correct size for a better fit. She also provided Samantha and her mom some options and product numbers for them to order supplies.

Samantha went from having to change her colostomy pouch two to three times every day, to once every four days. FaceTime help made all the difference in her recovery, she said.

“Being able to see the person face-to-face was a lot easier than trying to listen and guess on how to work the product,” she said.

A feeling echoed by Hill back at LGH.

“I get really stressed when particularly a young person has a new ostomy,” she said. “I wish I could bring her into my clinic and give her all the support and get the right fit. I just love this idea of doing Face Time. Having an ostomy is very sensitive, it’s about your bodily functions and to give them a face they know they can call or go to if there are issues, I think that’s really important.”

It’s these kinds of success stories VCH’s Virtual Health Team is excited to see.

Heather Boersma, the Regional Director-Virtual Health, said she expects to see more and more scenarios like this in future, pointing out the return on investment in the travel costs alone by using the technology.

“It’s easy and everyone uses [FaceTime] in their day-to-day life,” she said, adding Virtual Health is considering a different technology as an end-solution since not everyone has an iPhone.

In the meantime, health practitioners are encouraged to take advantage of FaceTime if it works for them and their clients.

For a year VCH has had a policy in place for the use of FaceTime to meet or help in treatment for patients. The only requirement is patient consent and ensuring iCloud is turned off.

The breakthrough over the phone was also a welcome relief to Samantha’s mom.

“It’s been crazy tough, just having to watch your daughter go through this,” Leah said. “You don’t want to see your kids hurting and when her skin broke down like that, I felt like I was doing something wrong.”

She said she wanted to tell her daughter’s story so young people don’t find themselves in the same situation.

“We really need our children to take care of themselves and listen to their bodies,” Leah said. “Go to the doctor and get things checked out.”

To learn more about Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence and find an NSWOCC near you, click on the link <http://nswoc.ca/>

To learn more about VCH's FaceTime guidelines click on the link <https://my.vch.ca/dept-project/Virtual-Health/Pages/Facetime-for-clinical-care.aspx>