



Androscoggin Valley Hospital  
North Country Home Health & Hospice Agency  
Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital  
Weeks Medical Center

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Distribution**

**Media Contacts Listed Below**

### **Dartmouth-Hitchcock Center for Connected Care to Launch Pilot Virtualist Program with North Country Healthcare Affiliate Hospitals**

*Program will offer virtual consultations in high-demand specialties to patients at their local hospitals.*

**Lebanon, NH (March 11, 2020)** – The [Dartmouth-Hitchcock \(D-H\) Center for Connected Care](#) is preparing to launch a Virtualist Pilot Program with eight local hospitals in New Hampshire, including Androscoggin Valley Hospital (AVH), Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital (UCVH), and Weeks Medical Center (WMC) to provide patients with prompt access to specialty care which may not be available locally.

Virtualists are board-certified specialty physicians who treat patients in a ‘virtual’ setting using telehealth technology. With D-H’s Virtualist Pilot Program, physicians in high-demand specialties such as gastroenterology, pulmonology and infectious disease will offer consultations to adult Inpatients at their local hospitals via D-H’s Center for Telehealth at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) in Lebanon. As the D-H Virtualist Pilot Program progresses, cardiology consultations will be added.

Using Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA)-compliant software, D-H Virtualists will meet with Inpatients upon the request of the local hospital practitioner and conduct two-way interactive audiovisual assessments and recommendations. The Virtualists will work collaboratively with the local providers and patient care teams with the ultimate goal of keeping patients local whenever possible.

“The D-H Virtualist Pilot Program grew out of an increasing demand for consultations in certain specialties, which would often require patients to travel to a tertiary care center, such as Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center,” said Kevin Curtis, MD, MS, Medical Director of Dartmouth-Hitchcock’s Center for Telehealth. “We are excited to pilot this new element of telemedicine, working in tandem with the outstanding care teams at eight rural hospitals, to offer patients who require specialty care the opportunity to receive that care close to home.”

The D-H Virtualist Pilot Program will be available to patients Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at AVH, UCVH, WMC and five other hospitals within New Hampshire.

“The resources of the D-H Virtualist Pilot Program will help advance the integration of care for the patients of North Country Healthcare affiliates,” commented Tom Mee, RN, BSN, MBA, System Chief Executive Officer, North Country Healthcare. “These offerings will expand upon the comprehensive services that we offer and help us fulfill our Mission of assuring consistent, high-quality, accessible, and integrated healthcare. We look forward to continuing our relationship with Dartmouth-Hitchcock.”

Hospitals and health systems across the country are facing increased pressures – from lack of beds and overcrowding, to changing reimbursement models and declining numbers of specialists. In rural communities, the shortage is especially acute. Telehealth, and programs such as D-H’s Virtualist Pilot Program, can help hospitals increase access to evidence-based care by providing their Inpatient clinical teams with specialty support.

With nearly two million people residing in rural communities across northern New England telemedicine will play an increasingly vital role in providing patients with access to the care they need within their own communities.

The D-H Center for Connected Care was founded in 2012 with a primary objective of helping to deliver outstanding health care to the region independent of a patient’s physical location. D-H telehealth services are designed to drive accessible, efficient and effective care by complementing and enhancing existing programs and services provided in local communities. D-H’s Connected Care telehealth program currently serves more than 20 hospitals in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, providing services such as TeleEmergency, TeleICN (Intensive

Care Neonatology), TeleNeurology, TelePharmacy, TelePsychiatry, TeleSpecialty and TeleUrgent Care in addition to TeleICU.

[DARTMOUTH-HITCHCOCK HEALTH](#) (D-HH), New Hampshire's only academic health system and the state's largest private employer, serves a population of 1.9 million across Northern New England. D-H provides access to more than 2,400 providers in almost every area of medicine, delivering care at its flagship hospital, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) in Lebanon, NH. DHMC was named in 2019 as the #1 hospital in New Hampshire by [U.S. News & World Report](#), and recognized for high performance in 13 clinical specialties and procedures. Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health also includes the [Norris Cotton Cancer Center](#), one of only 51 NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers in the nation; the [Children's Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, the state's only children's hospital](#); affiliated member hospitals in Lebanon, Keene, and New London, NH, and Windsor, VT, and Visiting Nurse and Hospice for Vermont and New Hampshire; and 24 Dartmouth-Hitchcock clinics that provide ambulatory services across New Hampshire and Vermont. The D-H system trains nearly 400 residents and fellows annually, and performs world-class research, in partnership with the [Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth](#) and the [White River Junction VA Medical Center](#) in White River Junction, VT.

[North Country Healthcare](#) (NCH) is a non-profit affiliation of four medical facilities in the White Mountains Region of New Hampshire. NCH includes numerous physicians and medical providers at multiple locations. This leading comprehensive healthcare network which employs hundreds of highly-trained individuals delivers integrated patient care through three community hospitals, medical laboratories, and home health and hospice services. NCH remains committed to the health and well-being of the communities it serves.

Member organizations include Androscoggin Valley Hospital in Berlin, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital in Colebrook, Weeks Medical Center in Lancaster, and North Country Home Health and Hospice Agency in Littleton. NCH is proud to be the largest employer in the North Country.

North Country Healthcare also collaborates with two Federally Qualified Health Clinics: Coös County Family Health Services in Berlin and Indian Stream Health Center in Colebrook. Together they have formed a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) to develop a Clinically Integrated Network for all hospitals and providers in the North Country to address population health and to improve the health indicators for all of the residents of the North Country.

###

**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

**Dartmouth-Hitchcock**

Lisa Cramb

O: 603-644-3200 ext. 25

M: 603-689-6986

[lcramb@montagnecom.com](mailto:lcramb@montagnecom.com)

Rick Adams

O: 603-653-1910

M: 603-359-2497

[rick.adams@hitchcock.org](mailto:rick.adams@hitchcock.org)

**North Country Healthcare**

James A. Patry

O: 603-326-5606

[james.patry@avnhh.org](mailto:james.patry@avnhh.org)