

My Telehealth

Q&A

With *Shannon Dingle, PMHNP-BC*
MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER



Q: How does telehealth benefit mental health patients?

Telehealth is ideal for patients with social anxiety or those who can become combative in a clinic setting. It also allows for more frequent follow-ups, because it's easier to make a video call than to schedule an in-person appointment. The patient doesn't need to take off school or work because we can meet in the early evening. The appointment can be as long or as brief as the patient needs.

Q: Does telehealth improve your ability to provide care?

Given the stigma attached to mental health, some people are more likely to keep their appointment if it's virtual. They don't worry about being seen at a mental health clinic. Better attendance for appointments allows me to provide continuous care. It usually means we do a better job of keeping their medication current too.

It's also helpful given the uptick in mental health needs following the pandemic. During COVID we all began to realize that, now more than ever, there are more patients than mental health providers can serve. Telehealth is not a panacea, but it does make it easier for providers to bridge that gap.

Tel·e·health

noun

Quality mental health care without the stigma

Q: How can providers ensure patients get the care that's right for them?

Telehealth isn't right for every patient. For example, it can be challenging for patients with more severe psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia. When we're in a session, we look for the patient's non-verbal communication to help inform our assessment. It can be hard to grasp those cues through a computer, so in-person appointments are essential.

Patients and providers need to work together to figure out the right type of care for that specific patient and that condition.

Q: How does telehealth affect the patient-provider relationship?

With virtual appointments, you use different strategies to build trust with the patient. It's easy for the patient to feel disconnected to the provider or to worry that the provider is distracted. I've used skills from my teaching background to communicate and connect with patients virtually.

One nice benefit is that telehealth platforms make it easier for me to write notes and prescription instructions and send them to patients after a session. I call them "wrap-up" documents and they help reiterate what we discussed during the appointment.

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Q: How can policy improve telehealth?

It's important we get past practice restrictions based on state lines and state-specific licensure. Interstate compacts, where a group of states agree to recognize the licenses of one another's health care

providers, can help with that. The more patients a provider can reach, regardless of geography, the more we can close the gap in mental health resources.



PATIENT & PROVIDER
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