

Telehealth
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Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon, Senator Kelly, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee: My name is Dr. Irene Abramovich. I am a Psychiatrist and the Medical Director for Generations Family Health Center's Behavioral Health Department. I carry a large caseload and manage our patients' behavioral health medications. Generations is a Federally Qualified Community Health Center that provides medical, dental, behavioral health and support services in eastern Connecticut. Since implementing telehealth, the number of patients seen in our Behavioral Health Department has been much higher than before due to lower no show rates/better attendance. Despite these very trying times, we were able to extend our help to patients in the community, maintaining the level of care they need because of telehealth.

It would be very unfortunate if this platform is not allowed anymore. I do not believe the pandemic will end but expect the second wave to start in the fall and continue until there is a vaccine on the market. Unless the epidemiological situation is completely under control, it would be an unjustifiable risk to open up Behavioral Health services for face-to-face visits.

This remote communication offers additional benefits besides the safety aspect. Prior to the use of telehealth, quite a few of my patients were not able to get to Generations because of the lack of transportation or ambulation difficulties (wheelchairs and walkers). Some of them were not able to leave the house because of high levels of anxiety and psychotic isms and unable to get the care they needed. For this population specifically, ongoing video appointments would be crucial regardless of pandemic. Making tele psychiatry an integral part of our treatment modalities would be extremely beneficial for the community as it would allow us to increase the volume and quality of much needed psychiatric help in eastern Connecticut.

I would like to share several examples of the types of patients that have benefited from telehealth psychiatry services:

- Numerous patients on our caseloads suffer from depression and have extreme anxiety about COVID. If they had not been able to be seen via telehealth, I would not have been able to prescribe the medications that they need to help with their depression and anxiety.
- Numerous patients remain stable as long as they can be monitored weekly, and telehealth allowed us to monitor them and their medications.
- Recently, one of my patients who suffers from polyarthropathy could not drive due to her pain levels but needed to be seen by me in order to receive psychiatric treatment. Had

she not been able to do it through a telephone visit, she would not have been able to get her required medications refilled.

- One patient could not come into the office due to childcare issues with her children doing distance learning and the distance to Generations' office from her home. This virtual visit allowed her to get the medications she needs to take care of her family and keep her job as well.
- One of my patients with dementia and anxiety that is in a wheelchair was unable to arrange transportation due to COVID-19, but thanks to telehealth, was able to get the ongoing supervision with her medications that she needs.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Providers like me have had tremendous success with telepsychiatry, and we need to make access to this kind of behavioral health care permanent so that we can provide behavioral health care services to all of the residents in Connecticut.