

# Emergency Telemental Health Implementation: Moving Fast While Maintaining Standard of Care

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# What Are We Doing Here?

*This event will assume that attendees are mental/behavioral health counselors and therapists working to get existing, in-person clients into online therapy, and that those clients will be remaining in the therapist's own local area.*

# Technology Choices and HIPAA

- Normally, insurance won't cover phone sessions outside of some frontier/very rural areas.
  - Many are changing this for COVID-19, so phone sessions might be a go. Check with your panels (or do cash pay.)
- Secure videoconferencing
  - Free options for solo practice:  
<https://personcenteredtech.com/2016/02/16/free-online-therapy-software-compared-usefulness-ase-security-support-hipaa/>
  - Good option for group practices:  
<https://www.clocktree.com/>
  - Non-free option for therapy groups:  
<https://zoom.us/healthcare>
- Email
  - Secure email: Hushmail, LuxSci, etc.
  - Client portals
  - Conventional w/ BAA: GSuite, MS 365
    - Still need client consent for nonsecure communications
- Secure texting
  - Signal for solo practices
  - Spruce, OhMD
  - Client portal apps
- HIPAA compliance
  - Products don't make you compliant, but can help prevent you from being noncompliant or committing violations.
  - "It's a process, not a product!"

*Remember! HIPAA is a process, not a product!*

GoToWebinar Support # is: **800-263-6317**

# Informed Consent and Risk Management

- Know your rules:
  - Licensing Board
  - Ethics Codes
  - State Laws
  - (Payers)
- Be insured
  - What will your professional liability insurance cover?
- Be licensed/permitted to practice
  - Authorities where the client is located at time of session have jurisdiction.
  - So does the authority that licenses you.
  - So would others, if you are licensed/registered with them or located in their region at time of service.
  - Many states allow temp practice, and many are opening it up for COVID-19
- Inform clients of risks and benefits
  - Access, ease
  - Potential for failure, privacy
- Appropriateness for the medium
  - Clients must be informed that you will be assessing this (recommend enrolling them in self-assessment, as well)
- Inform client about safety and failure planning
- Tell the client what their role is
  - Client needs to make their space appropriate, and set up equipment for clinical effectiveness
  - Online relationships are different. Coach clients to stay aware that you are real and you are really doing therapy.
- Talk about recording

# On-Camera Effectiveness (for you and client)

- Lighting
- Camera placement/angle
- Posture
- Behavior
- Picture-in-Picture
- Environment
- Clothing
- Close everything else that is using the Internet
- Coach clients to place their camera at eye level and look at it. This helps enough to be worth the trouble!
- Ask clients to put a light behind their camera -- make sure you can see their faces.
- Use the biggest screens you can, and expand each other to full screen. (“Blow each other up,” as I say with clients.)
- Client prep page you can use:  
<https://personcenteredtech.com/tmh/clients/>

# First Session Prep and General Session Flow

- Make a safety plan
  - Where will they go if they decompensate?
  - Who can you contact if they have an emergency?
  - Remember: they are not in your room! They may not even be in your area.
- Make a tech recovery plan
  - Usually, this means talking about using the telephone as a backup in case your videoconferencing software fails for some reason.
  - Don't let a dropped connection be how you end a session!
- Deliver materials securely
  - Download from your website
  - Client portal
  - Secure email
- Assess Appropriateness
  - Will the medium get in the way of therapy?
  - Do you have the skills to remotely help this person with their particular health issues?
  - If needed, set up a “patient support person” to help ensure safety
- Ensure psychological and scene safety
  - Have the client show you the room
  - Make safe words with clients whose home environment may not be so safe
- Document the *address* of the client's location at time of session
- If doing phone or textual communication, consider establishing a code word or phrase that confirms the client's identity when you communicate

# What We Aren't Teaching Here

- Online Disinhibition Effect and other clinical considerations of remote therapy media
- The special clinical opportunities afforded by telehealth media
- Vicissitudes of working across jurisdictions
- Group therapy and family therapy logistics and techniques
- Preparing to work in new regions -- finding local help, emergency services, etc.
- *A lot* about digital security and HIPAA compliance
- Working with “originating sites” -- other service locations who hire you to perform services for their client/patient
- Proper use of your website for a telemental health practice
- Bigger picture of technology selection to support your practice's operations
- Reimbursement and finding contracts/employers

# Resources

- Person Centered Tech Telemental Health Articles and Posts: <https://personcenteredtech.com/category/telehealth/>
- Telehealth Resource Centers: <https://www.telehealthresourcecenter.org/>
- Centers for Connected Health Policy Telehealth Reimbursement Coverage Map: <https://www.cchpca.org/telehealth-policy/current-state-laws-and-reimbursement-policies>
- American Telemedicine Association Guidelines for Working With Children: [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AMERICANTELEMED/618da447-dee1-4ee1-b941-c5bf3db5669a/UploadedImages/Practice%20Guideline%20Covers/NEW\\_ATA%20Children%20&%20Adolescents%20Guidelines.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AMERICANTELEMED/618da447-dee1-4ee1-b941-c5bf3db5669a/UploadedImages/Practice%20Guideline%20Covers/NEW_ATA%20Children%20&%20Adolescents%20Guidelines.pdf)
- Epstein, Becker, Green 50 State Telehealth Laws Survey App: <https://www.ebglaw.com/telemental-health-laws-app/>
- Announcement of expansion of Medicare coverage on March 17th: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/president-trump-expands-telehealth-benefits-medicare-beneficiaries-during-covid-19-outbreak>