

In seven (7) days Family Health Centers of Southwest Florida, Inc., pivoted to providing health care via telehealth. In less than 30 days, telehealth was fully integrated into the Family Health Centers health care model.

Family Health Centers staff identified and overcame multiple challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that our patients continued to receive the health care they needed.

The Family Health Centers Telehealth Timeline

Week of March 23rd:

Started implementing COVID-19 guidelines for staff, providers & patients, including planning for the use of Telehealth. Main goals were:

- Protect the health and safety of our patients, providers and staff by limiting in-office visits to only those essential.
 - Ensure any changes made to the care model must include continued focus on our mission to provide Quality healthcare and be Accessible to all.
 - Accommodate remote work needs for providers who have personal or family health issues that may be compromised by face-to-face visits.
1. Identified low cost, easy to use (for patients AND providers) platforms for Telehealth visits that met standards for HIPAA and billing.
 2. Identified providers to conduct Telehealth visits: initially, a fulltime Pediatric provider and Adult Medicine provider. Both providers were bilingual English/Spanish.
 3. Purchased 10 cellphones, loaded Facetime and What's App on them, and trained providers on expectations and usage as the phones were deployed.
 4. Set up Telehealth appointment templates for new and established patients (30-minute intervals to allow for technical difficulties), and provider documentation templates that included the necessary elements to receive payment for virtual visits.
 5. Added COVID-19 related diagnosis and procedure codes to provider "Favorites" to expedite the dropping and posting of charges.
 6. Identified criteria for patients who could be scheduled for Telehealth:
 - a. Peds: any type of sickness or medical questions, ADHD and Asthma follow up, medication refills, follow up on a prior diagnosis. Well visits and immunizations were not included.
 - b. Adult: any type of sickness or medical questions, HTN and Diabetes follow up, medication refills, follow up on a prior diagnosis.
 7. Trained the Call Center staff to triage calls and direct appropriate patients to Telehealth visits.

Week of March 30th:

1. Added COVID-19 information and the availability of Telehealth visits to our website.

2. Sent out “blast” messages to patients informing them of Telehealth appointment availability.
3. Two providers began conducting Telehealth visits. Expanded hours were implemented for adult patient visits (starting at 7am).
4. The current check-in system, Phreesia, was enhanced by
 - a. Linking specific “interviews” (which included COVID-19 screening questions) to the Telehealth appointment type.
 - b. Patients received the appropriate interview questions via their preferred communication method (text or email) three days prior to the Telehealth appointment. This gave the front office time to confirm demographics, consents etc. beforehand, and allowed a one click check-in at the time of their appointment.

Week of April 6th:

Added an additional Adult Med provider to conduct Telehealth visits four days per week.

Added one CNM to conduct OB/GYN Telehealth visits, restricted to pregnant patients who are established with FHC, are low risk, and less than 36 weeks gestational age.

The main workflow change was that co-pay requests were disabled in Phreesia (patient check-in application) allowing the patient to complete all paperwork without being prompted for a payment.

Week of April 13th:

Added one additional Adult Med provider to conduct Telehealth visits four days per week.

Week of April 24th:

Added one more Adult Med provider one full day and 2 half days per week. OBGYN Telehealth was discontinued due to a lack of consistent demand.

By the end of April, Telehealth visits were incorporated into the FHC routine with one Pediatric provider and four Adult Medicine providers providing accessible quality healthcare to patients in need during the pandemic.