

Bring mental health treatment to rural communities with a click

I was inspired by Byron Dobson's recent piece highlighting FSU College of Medicine's efforts to introduce students to opportunities to serve those living in rural areas. The need for quality health care in our underserved communities cannot be overstated.

We must continue to find ways to provide holistic care to citizens in these neighborhoods, from Havana to Perry to Quincy – and just about everywhere in between.

Regardless of the community, there seems to be a commonality among the challenges facing residents in our rural areas: lack of access. There's a lack of access to health systems and health practitioners. Also, as Dobson reported, these communities also struggle with a lack of access to mental health providers.

But Children's Home Society of Florida is changing that.

No longer does location determine access. With Children's Home Society of Florida's telehealth service, residents can receive high-quality, caring, confidential counseling right in the comfort of their own homes. All they need is a smartphone, computer or tablet.

A recent survey by the Health Industry Distributors Association reveals that telehealth is enhancing patient-physician relationships, and patients cite speed, convenience and clinical quality as top factors that contribute to their high levels of satisfaction with telehealth. Moreover, 54 percent of those surveyed prefer the experience of telehealth over a traditional office visit.

When it comes to treating mental health conditions, telehealth could be the solution that provides access to millions who struggle without treatment. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that more than 43 million U.S. adults suffer from some form of mental illness, and many individuals' mental health needs go untreated due to gaps in resources or delivery of services – this is especially prevalent in rural communities, as Dobson's article stated.

Adding to the challenge: There's an immediate need for 4,000 mental health providers nationwide, according to the Health Resources and Services Administration. Can telehealth solve that challenge? Not yet – but the convenience it offers to both patients and clinicians may encourage more professionals to choose such a career path.

As mental health treatment continues to be a key conversation throughout the country, Children's Home Society of Florida remains committed to delivering the solutions that can reach children, teens, adults and entire families where they're at.

With telehealth counseling, we will reshape the futures for more kids and families in the Big Bend — no matter where they live.

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Your Turn

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