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Benefits and Potential Risks of Telehealth in a Mental Health Setting

Disclaimer: This information is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical or legal advice.

Alternative options: You as the recipient of care always have the right to pursue in-person care.

Telehealth: What to Expect, and Understanding the Risks and Benefits

Telehealth, or tele-mental health, allows you to meet with a licensed mental health professional remotely using video conferencing, phone calls, or secure messaging. While offering many advantages, it also carries unique risks compared to in-person services.

Benefits of Telehealth

- **Convenience and Accessibility:** Telehealth removes barriers like travel time and geography, making it easier to fit appointments into a busy schedule. This is particularly helpful for those in remote areas or with mobility challenges.
- **Greater Comfort and Privacy:** Attending a session in a familiar and private environment can help you feel more comfortable and open. It also offers a higher level of discretion, which may reduce the stigma some feel about visiting a therapist's office.
- **Reduced stigma:** For some, seeking mental health care from home feels less intimidating and stigmatizing than visiting a therapist's office in person.
- **Flexibility and Continuity of Care:** With greater flexibility in scheduling, telehealth can help ensure you don't miss appointments. This also allows for continuity of care during travel or in situations that prevent in-person meetings.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Telehealth can save you money on travel, gas, and potentially time off from work or childcare expenses.

Risks and Limitations of Telehealth

- **Technology Issues:** A stable internet connection and reliable device are necessary for a telehealth session. Poor connections or technical glitches can disrupt the session, impacting the therapeutic process.
- **Privacy Concerns:** It is your responsibility to find a private and quiet space for each session to avoid being overheard. While our platform is secure and HIPAA-compliant, no online communication is 100% risk-free. You should use a secure, private network and take precautions to protect the privacy of your session.
- **Limitations in crisis situations:** In a severe crisis, like a patient experiencing suicidal thoughts, a remote therapist cannot offer direct, in-person assistance. Our Authorization for Electronic Communication in your patient portal outlines emergency protocols.
- **Difficulty detecting nonverbal cues:** Therapists may miss subtle nonverbal signals, such as body language, fidgeting, or signs of substance use, that would be more apparent in person.
- **Inappropriate for some conditions:** Certain serious psychiatric illnesses, such as psychosis, or complex issues may not be appropriate for telehealth and may require in-person care.
- **Differences from In-Person Care:** The lack of physical presence means the therapist may miss subtle non-verbal cues, such as body language, which could impact a full assessment. For some, this can also make building a strong therapeutic relationship more challenging.
- **Crisis and Emergency Situations:** Telehealth is not appropriate for all mental health conditions, particularly severe cases that require close monitoring or immediate intervention. In the event of a mental health crisis, your therapist will follow an established emergency protocol.
- **Interstate Practice Limitations:** Therapists are typically only licensed to provide care in certain states. You must inform your therapist of your physical location at the start of every session to ensure they are licensed to practice in that state.

Informed consent is required before beginning telehealth services, you will be asked to complete an Authorization for Electronic Communication in your patient portal. This process ensures you understand and agree to the specific risks and benefits of receiving care remotely from this practice. It will also cover emergency protocols, billing, and what to do if the technology fails.