

INFORMATION ABOUT TELEPSYCHIATRY

What is telepsychiatry?

Telepsychiatry is the use of two-way real-time interactive audio and video equipment to provide and support mental health services at a distance. Such services do not include a telephone conversation, electronic mail message or facsimile transmission between a provider and a recipient, or a consultation between two professional or clinical staff.

Why use telepsychiatry? The benefits of telepsychiatry can include improved access to care, provision of care locally in a more timely fashion, improved continuity of care, improved treatment compliance, and coordination of care.

How does telepsychiatry work?

Telepsychiatry is used for inpatient, outpatient, and emergency room psychiatric services. Telepsychiatry sessions are similar to regular face-to-face sessions with a psychiatric provider, except that the provider and patient are in different locations. There is a television screen or computer monitor in both locations that allows two-way real time interactive video and audio communication. A staff member or therapist is present or close by during sessions to provide any assistance that may be needed.

Do I have to operate the telepsychiatry equipment?

Patients do not have to operate the equipment themselves when they participate in telepsychiatry. Staff members in both locations prepare the equipment ahead of time, so patients can come into the room, see the provider on the screen, and begin the session.

Is telepsychiatry as effective as regular visits?

While your experience may be different, research shows that telepsychiatry is just as effective as treatment provided face-to-face and that patients and their families are usually very satisfied with the care they receive. The American Psychiatric Association has determined that “Telemedicine in psychiatry, using video conferencing, is a validated and effective practice of medicine that increases access to care.” Many of our own patients have remarked how comfortable their experience with telepsychiatry has been, even if they initially had doubts about participating.

Do programs need special approval to use telepsychiatry?

Yes. The New York State Office of Mental Health requires hospitals and clinics to meet certain standards in order to use telepsychiatry. Our programs were the first in the state to meet those standards and to receive approval to use telepsychiatry, apart from programs operated by New York State itself.

What if I don't want to participate in telepsychiatry?

Patients have the right to decline to participate in telepsychiatry and to receive equivalent services face-to-face. In such instances, we make every effort to provide the face-to-face service as promptly as possible. There may be a delay in scheduling the service, however, it may be necessary for patients to travel to more distant locations and there may be risks related to such delays and travel.

What else should I know about telepsychiatry?

- You should know that the equipment we use for telepsychiatry has been specially designed to protect your privacy and that sessions are not recorded.
- You should know that your telepsychiatry practitioner will ask you at the beginning of each session to confirm that you are voluntarily consenting to participate in telepsychiatry.
- You should know that even though your telepsychiatry practitioner is at a different location, they are considered to be an active member of the treatment team in the program where you are seen, and they work cooperatively with the other mental health providers involved in your care at that location.

Where can I find additional information about telepsychiatry?

These reputable professional organizations have information about telepsychiatry on their websites:

American Psychiatric Association

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-telepsychiatry>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Telepsychiatry-and-Your-Child-108.aspx