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THERAPY

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Spectrum Health using app to get more people needed therapy

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CADILLAC NEWS

In an effort to improve access to behavioral health services throughout the state, Spectrum Health and Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services are teaming up on teletherapy.

Building on their strong, collaborative relationship, both organizations have developed a program that addresses a gap in services and fills a vital community need.

“We want people to know that this service is out there for them if they need it,” Spectrum Health Director of Virtual

Health Mandy Reed said. “We are also hoping to reduce the stigma in seeking a service for mental health and we are hoping that, by doing that, we can have a positive impact.”

With the Spectrum Health Now app, Spectrum Health is offering teletherapy to treat anxiety, depression, grief, stress and

sadness.

Though the Spectrum Health app, the service is available to anyone in Michigan aged 18 or older.

Once set up, patients will be able to have access to a therapist within 48 hours right from the comfort of the patient’s home.

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PHOTOS: PIXABAY.COM

Spectrum Health and Pine Rest Christian Mental health Services are teaming up and have developed a program that addresses a gap in services that fills a vital community need. Spectrum Health is now offering teletherapy to treat anxiety, depression, grief, stress, and sadness with the Spectrum Health Now app.

Therapy: Starting Nov. 1, patients will pay through a self-pay rate

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Both Spectrum Health and Pine Rest are experienced in the field of telemedicine. Spectrum Health began video visits for primary care in 2015, treating conditions such as fever, allergies and rashes, and recently conducted its 100,000th visit. It also launched a telemedicine approach for specialists to connect with patients.

Pine Rest has been conducting telehealth services since 2013. In the past year, the company has provided 25,000 telehealth visits.

But unlike Spectrum's other telemedicine, the system for therapy is set up a little differently in order to make sure the patient is getting the help they may need.

"When dealing with potentially high-risk factors that come with the symptoms of depression

and anxiety, it is important that the patient has a pre-assessment before getting an appointment to make sure there are no immediate needs," Reed said.

For example, Reed said, after filling out their symptoms on the app, a patient will be taken to a page with a phone number rather than an appointment page. For initial access, individuals should call 844-322-7374.

After calling that number patients will be connected with a virtual medical assistant who will take them through the process of confirming their identity, making sure they are not an urgent case and setting up their first appointment. Reed said keeping an actual person as the first point of contact is key to getting an individual the help they may need.

"It is important that we keep that first point of con-

tact a real person," Reed said. "The virtual medical assistant will then assess the person and determine if they truly are not an urgent case. When dealing with potentially 'high risk' patients, you want to make sure safety is a priority and then make sure they are getting the quality help they need."

Once the virtual medical assistant determines that a patient does not need more immediate assistance, a patient's first appointment will be set up and a reminder will be sent to the app and the patient's email.

After a patient's first meeting, it will then be determined if more appointments are needed and the appointments will be set up before the end of the meeting, Reed said.

"Some feel better after just one or two sessions," she said, "but it is common

that people will need more than that. How often or how many will be determined between the patient and their therapist."

Though a medical service, this teletherapy system is for therapy only and the therapist will not be prescribing any medication, Reed said. Should a therapist feel medication may be necessary to help a patient, they will recommend going in to see a doctor.

"The teletherapy is designed for getting people someone to talk to and help them work through whatever it is they are dealing with," Reed said. "Anything beyond that would require the patient to visit a doctor's office who can further assess and decide if further steps need to be taken."

Currently, the service will be paid through a copay with a patient's in-

surance. The teletherapy services will be covered by most insurance providers.

Starting Nov. 1, however, patients will pay for the service through a self-pay rate, said Reed. The pay rate will keep all teletherapy appointments at \$90 or less with or without insurance.

This service is not for

emergency situations. Those with suicidal thoughts or more urgent behavioral health needs should call 911, go to a local emergency department or call the confidential National Suicide Prevention Hotline, which is free and available 24/7, at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

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