

Doing Telehealth All Along

Commonsense Childbirth expands virtual care during global pandemic

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“When COVID started, we didn’t have to pivot,” said Jennie Joseph, founder and director of Commonsense Childbirth. “We had been doing telehealth all along but had not named it. What the pandemic allowed us to do was have our clinicians, educators, and doulas be able to deliver their services through telehealth officially.”

Based in Winter Garden, Florida, Commonsense Childbirth envisions “a maternity care climate saturated with culturally sensitive and racially congruent care that results in equitable and superior outcomes in maternal and infant health for all populations.” The organization focuses on access to quality care and workforce development within a birthing center and outpatient prenatal and postnatal space.

Commonsense Childbirth provides the standard of care for pregnant patients but extends postpartum care as long as desired as well as wraparound and clinical support, limited family planning, and well-women services.

During the pandemic, the organization followed association guidelines regarding how many in-person visits were necessary during pregnancy. “We were able to send telehealth kits to patients’ homes,” Joseph said. “Mothers were given a doppler, blood pressure cuff, and urinalysis strips during their third trimester.”

Although some patients opted for video calls, the vast majority preferred phone visits. “We were able to listen to the baby using the doppler during phone calls, but the mothers always had them available at home so they could listen to their baby whenever they wanted,” Joseph said. “That was very empowering for them. We also trained them on how to read and report their blood pressure results; they enjoyed being their own sentinel.”

Commonsense Childbirth continued its between visit check-ins as well as providing ongoing resources to its patients. “Now, we can use Google Meet and Zoom to interact with patients,” Joseph said. “Our non-clinical providers have found a much richer connection with our clients. They understand they will hear from us on a regular basis across the board.”

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Telehealth tools have added longevity to relationships and flexibility to scheduling for clients. “They can choose the modality that works best for them,” Joseph said. “They just want to ask questions and get solid answers. Phone communication works in many cases so we don’t get caught up with equipment or smartphone issues.”

Commonsense Childbirth has conducted satisfaction surveys and found that clients feel safe and really have no concerns about receiving care through telehealth, especially when they have the kits as well.

“Even during the heaviest period of COVID when we saw no one on-site, we were still able to connect with clients,” Joseph said. “If we had to refer them to triage or the hospital, we could still maintain that relationship, send and receive reports, and collaborate with those providers.”

Regardless of how COVID continues to progress, Commonsense Childbirth continues to utilize telehealth and is now expanding its telehealth kit program to other areas. “We are piloting this program with Perinatal Safe Spots™, which are a part of our national task force that trains community health workers, midwives, and clinicians to use telehealth in this way,” Joseph said. “Providers need training on how to run a telehealth appointment effectively and hone their listening skills. This program provides a lot of flexibility to give that support to both providers and families. We want to meet patients where they are and let them lead.”

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