

Telehealth Increases Access to Mental Healthcare for Children and Teens



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Mental Health



According to the Child Mind® Institute Children’s Mental Health Report¹, of the 74.5 million children in the United States, an estimated 17.1 million have or have had psychiatric disorders—more than the number of children with cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined—with half of all psychiatric illness occurring before the age of 14, and 75 percent by the age of 24.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)² is a psychiatric disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from the initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD. Children, who generally have greater trouble processing emotional trauma, may fall into this category.



Natural Disasters and Mental Health



In an article by Carolyn Kousky, entitled “Impacts of Natural Disasters on Children”³, she states that “a disaster can cause children stress and trauma, which can be exacerbated by witnessing their parents’ stress. For children, such a situation can lead to mental health problems that can, in turn, affect physical health and schooling.”

According to Psychology Today⁴, there are various types of common traumatic events, all known to lead to PTSD. One common type of trauma results from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tornadoes or hurricanes, forest fires, floods, volcanic eruptions, landslides, or tsunamis.

Professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder and author of *Children of Katrina*⁵, Lori Peek said, “One of the big things we found is that children were actively hiding their distress from their parents because they knew that their parents were stressed out. The children were actually saying, ‘I didn’t want to be a burden for my parents.’”

It is not uncommon for children who have experienced the trauma of a natural disaster to internalize their stress reactions. As a result, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network⁶ website (www.nctsn.org) says, “they may experience depression, anxiety, or anger.” If left untreated, these problems only get worse, resulting in emotional, behavioral, and health problems that affect every area of their lives.

Regarding child and adolescent mental health, The National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)⁷ commented, “Mental health is an important part of overall health for children as well as adults. For many adults who have mental disorders, symptoms were present, but often not recognized or addressed in childhood and adolescence. For a young person with symptoms of a mental disorder, the earlier treatment is started, the more effective it can be. Early treatment can help prevent more severe, lasting problems as a child grows up.”

What Are the Barriers to Treatment?

Mental illness in children and adolescents is a huge problem, one that is further compounded by a variety of factors or barriers, including:

- Lack of Awareness
- Lack of Funds
- Living in Rural Areas
- Living in Areas with Healthcare Professional Shortages

And these all add up to: No Access to Mental Health Professionals



How To Reach Those In Need

Where better than school to reach out to children and teens who need treatment? While teachers are not trained psychiatrists, they do spend a great deal of time with their students and can recognize behavioral problems, which may be rooted in mental and emotional issues.

Educators can address those perceived issues using telehealth technology. Telehealth kiosks placed in a safe environment can bridge the gap between the children who need care and the mental health professionals who can give it. Access is the key, and telehealth is the solution.

What Is Telehealth?

Telehealth refers to a broad scope of remote healthcare services and can include non-clinical services, such as provider training, administrative meetings, and continuing medical education, in addition to clinical services. The market for Telehealth is growing rapidly and has the potential to deliver more than 6 billion dollars a year in healthcare savings.⁸ Increased cost efficiency is achieved by reducing transportation costs, minimizing readmissions, and eliminating unnecessary ER visits. Additional benefits include improved quality of care, better communication among providers, and greater patient access to specialists like mental health providers. Telehealth that focuses on providing access to mental health providers is referred to as Telemental-health.



How Does TeleMental Health Work?



Telemental-health uses live, interactive video conferencing (telehealth kiosks or portals) to connect someone to a mental health professional. The physician, therapist, or counselor is then able to provide psychological counseling and support over the Internet. Additional interaction can occur via email, online chat, or phone calls. Of the various technologies currently in use in the telehealth field, interactive video telemental-health seems to provide the intervention most comparable to office-based treatment. In fact, outcomes from telemental-health interactions are similar to those receiving in-person therapy. Treatment relying on sophisticated telehealth equipment systems can be accessed from hospitals, clinics, educational institutions, professional offices, or any other settings that offers privacy to the user.

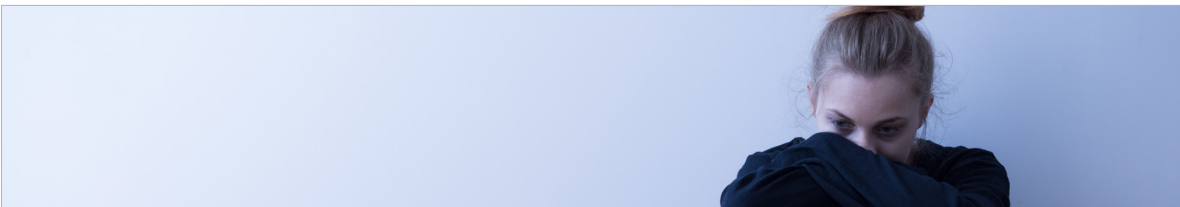
For example, an individual may go to a primary care physician's office or a general community clinic and obtain an assessment or treatment for a mental disorder or substance abuse via telehealth, without other patients knowing the purpose of the visit. Or a student may go in to see the school nurse and privately obtain an assessment or treatment for a mental disorder or substance abuse issue via telehealth without other students knowing the purpose of the visit. The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) can be part of the video sessions by cell phone or Internet connection through a HIPPA-compliant platform. Being able to be a part of the process in this way helps parents maximize the time they are able to devote to their child's wellness.

Where to Start?

Hurricane Michael was the third most intense Atlantic hurricane to make landfall in the contiguous United States and the first storm of its magnitude to do so on the Northeast Gulf Coast.⁹ After making landfall near Mexico Beach, Florida, on October 10, 2018, the Category 4 storm caused massive destruction leaving the region devastated nearly one year later. Some of those most impacted are the youngest and most vulnerable in the state. The emotional trauma left in the wake of this storm is devastating.

According to Art Cooksey, Founder & CEO of telehealth solutions provider Let's Talk Interactive, Inc., "teens and children are affected by PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and depression, leading to a high level of suicide in this area. Additionally, there is a shortage of providers in this area, so the situation is critical."

But there is hope — "Hope for Healing."



Hope for Healing



Spearheaded by Florida First Lady, Casey DeSantis “Hope for Healing” is a multi-agency, mental health and substance abuse campaign created to better serve the needs of Floridians struggling with mental issues and drug addiction.¹⁰ It incorporates the combined resources of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Florida Department of Education.

The goal is to break the stigma associated with mental illness and provide unparalleled access to quality mental healthcare to anyone who needs it—especially the next generation. And, where better than school to reach out to that next generation—children and teens who need treatment?

In association with Hope for Healing, the state of Florida deployed 63 Telemental-health kiosks at the start of the 2019-2020 school year—one for each of the schools in the six counties affected most by Hurricane Michael—Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Franklin, Jackson, and Liberty counties.

Let’s Talk Interactive, Inc. partnered with Howard Technology Solutions in order to build and install the 63 kiosks in a record, 42-day turnaround time. Art Cooksey remarked, “We are an experienced team and were able to move mountains with our partners here in the U.S. to combat this crisis facing not only the Panhandle, but also our country as a whole.”¹¹

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According to Howard’s Vice-President of Technology Sales, David Perkins, “Telehealth provides interactive healthcare options to many who might otherwise have to forego treatment. Creating school telehealth and telemental-health programs not only ensures that students get the help they need, but it also reduces absenteeism and saves healthcare dollars in the process. More and more schools are recognizing the benefits of having telehealth programs, so we are delighted to be involved in this project.”

These customized telemental-health kiosks will ensure that each of the more than 35,000 students in the affected areas has individual access to professional counseling and mental health services, accelerating the recovery process. At a recent news conference, Florida’s First Lady talked about this innovative technology. She explained: how students are able to participate in video-conferencing sessions.

“It’s an innovative technology where students can participate in a video-conferencing session—think of it as face-time with a mental health provider. Parents will be able to call into the session from wherever they are, while the student is in school, to maximize the time they have to devote to this, because we understand that parents are busy. If parents cannot be a part of the discussion, the physician will offer them a summary after it is over. And, most important to note is that this is 100-percent HIPAA compliant, because privacy is most important.”¹²



Implementing this groundbreaking technology enables students to access psychiatric care privately throughout the school year. Mental health professionals will be available to offer care and counseling through the Let’s Talk Interactive online platform. The telemental-health kiosks are available to all students using private insurance, Medicaid and Medicare and grants available through Big Bend Community Based Care (BBCBC). Let’s Talk Interactive plans to track the success of the initiative within the Panhandle throughout the school year, measuring the number of students who participate and are partnered with local providers. This data will be monitored by BBCBC’s Program Director Dr. George Baston and reported back to the State of Florida to highlight the impact the technology has throughout the year.

Florida First Lady DeSantis said, “Hope for Healing is about helping good people in crisis by leveraging the resources of our state agencies, private partners and our administration. Helping our youth and families avert drug addiction and address mental health issues will help them reach their full potential and lead healthier lives.”¹³

About Howard Technology Solutions



Howard Technology Solutions brings to market cutting-edge technology that is high quality, reliable, and affordable. From our own Howard manufactured products, such as desktops, notebooks, servers, kiosks, and medical carts to partner products from other leading technology innovators, such as Lenovo, HP, and Microsoft, you can be sure when you buy from Howard that you are getting the most for your technology dollars. Howard Technology Solutions' mission is to provide an affordable, top-quality product that exceeds your expectations, and our highly trained team of network professionals can provide you with installation, procurement, consulting and many other services to meet your needs.

About Let's Talk Interactive, INC.



Let's Talk Interactive, Inc. is a complete end-to-end Telehealth solutions provider, arming medical and behavioral health professionals with cutting-edge Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA) video conferencing software, kiosks and medical carts, network solutions, virtual clinics, and safe and secure online video conferencing capabilities while giving those in need instant access to care through its innovative technology platform. The company's telemedicine solutions enable providers to offer care at any time, from any location in the world and patients to directly connect to a licensed medical professional in real time.

Endnotes

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