



Telehealth during Crisis—MEBS Counseling’s Story



Mebs Counseling began delivering behavioral health services almost twenty years ago, providing children and their families with evidence-based behavioral health and substance abuse wrap-around services in the Northern Kentucky area. The clinic treats a vulnerable population. A large portion of their client base falls under the poverty line and face difficult socioeconomic barriers to access and care. Children and adults receive counseling and community-based services, including psychotherapy, assessments and evaluations, and case management. Mebs Counseling’s more than 50 providers comprise professionally licensed clinicians, targeted case management, and community living support workers that deliver care across settings and facilities, including schools and other institutions.

The facility began using the Azalea Health Electronic Health Record (EHR) software in 2014 to manage their patient population, 99 percent of which qualify for Medicaid. In early March of 2020, Jill Veach, Program Administrator for Mebs Counseling, started to look at Azalea Health’s telehealth solution as an additional tool to help facilitate patient care. Mebs Counseling is unique in that most of their services and support are provided outside of the clinic. They work across schools, institutions, and off-site centers, often through a team approach that engages multiple caregivers for a single patient. While many of these sessions are conducted

in person, Mebs Counseling needed a way to help ease connections between patients and caregivers through a remote care option like Azalea Health’s telehealth.

“A few weeks after we looked at a demo of the solution, COVID-19 hit,” said Veach. “That is when everything changed.”

Within 24 hours of the initial COVID-19 national announcement, the team at Mebs Counseling had the Azalea Health telehealth solution fully operational. Azalea Health made telehealth free to all providers on the organization’s EHR to help manage through the crisis. Mebs Counseling administrators tested workflow, pulled together supporting documentation, and scheduled training sessions for providers to operationalize the solution.

“The initial set-up was straightforward, and we had the baseline education and resources we needed to communicate and train our providers quickly,” explained Veach. Pivotal to the clinic’s success was a training approach that relied on daily support calls to help address questions, triage technical challenges, and share lessons learned across providers. “I’d say that the daily sessions were critical to driving adoption and lowering resistance. We established a daily office hour, where we demoed the solution and worked through any hiccups. By the fourth session, we didn’t have many attendees; the providers were off to the races with the technology.” As with any new process, adoption was met

with some skepticism. As providers and patients started to see the benefits of the telehealth approach, and as social distancing demanded remote patient care options, Mebs Counseling saw full engagement with the Azalea Health telehealth solution.

By the third week of go-live, **more than 700 patient encounters** were facilitated through telehealth for psychotherapy alone, putting the average number of telehealth visits at 10-15 per provider, per day. **In one week they were able to increase encounters by over 100.**



There were surprises along the way.

"Kids can be technology-driven; the telehealth sessions have created a fun environment and connection between our patients and providers," said Veach. "These kids are sometimes more comfortable talking to a screen than they are to a real person. We didn't anticipate how telehealth could make these kids more relaxed, open, and willing to talk. It was a great unintended outcome from the rollout of the telehealth program.

Telehealth will likely become a mainstay technology option at Mebs Counseling. The organization has seen great benefits to having remote treatment as an option—regardless of the COVID-19 crisis. "This point in time served as a catalyst for telehealth adoption for us," said Veach. "We see this as a wonderful tool to help us stay connected and to serve our patient population now and into the long term."

For more information on Mebs Counseling, visit www.MebsandAssociatesllc.org. And for more details on Azalea Health's telehealth solutions, please visit AzaleaHealth.com/solutions/telehealth.