

## MAKING TELEHEALTH EASY FOR PATIENTS MAY NOT BE AS EASY AS IT SEEMS

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Atlanta, Georgia –The Family Health Centers of Georgia, Inc. (FHCGA), a federally qualified health center, wants to make sure telehealth is made user friendly for socio-economically and medically underserved populations.

While telehealth is being promoted as a way to talk to your doctor during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know our communities need people support to make the transition. As FHCGA launched its telehealth service, resources were used to have dedicated staff to assist patients who may not be familiar with technical buzzwords (web enabled, browser, webcam, URL) or processes.

Our goal is to help connect our existing and new patients to the medical care they need during this time. Of the 21,000 patients we served in 2019, approximately 2000 were over the age of 60; and 20,538 provided documentable income at 100%, or greater, below the federal poverty level; which often results in them owning cellphones or computers that are less telehealth technology friendly. In addition, our patients want to know it's safe for them to submit information over the internet and that their telehealth visits are not being recorded.

For 45 years FHCGA has provided primary healthcare services to communities in the metropolitan Atlanta service areas, operating center locations in Georgia's Fulton, Cobb, Clayton, and Douglas Counties. We have learned that everyone cannot avoid coming to the doctor's office.

The answer is not as easy as telling our patients to make a telehealth visit, our offices are closed. Our patient population is at a greater risk of experiencing emergency medical needs related to hypertension, diabetes and uncontrolled asthma. "We don't want to overburden the emergency room with patients who don't need to be there because we can take care of them," Dr. Michael W. Brooks, FHCGA's President & CEO, said.

As FHCGA works to help patients understand telehealth, the message to those with conditions like diabetes or asthma, is to not miss necessary appointments and that our staff is making sure all patients stay safe upon arrival. "When you say shelter in place, not to get in large crowds, they think when they go to the doctor's office, they're going to be sitting around sick people," Brooks said. "So they just don't come."

<https://youtu.be/5eRtbtYpY0Y>. Our office locations in Cobb and Fulton Counties remain open Monday thru Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

FHCGA provided links via text messages and emails for patients to connect to our Patient Portal

<https://bit.ly/2JSrHZ8>. However, the most important information we provided was our **Patient Telehealth Appointment Line: 404-260-1524** which connects patients to support staff who make sure they understand their telehealth visit is HIPAA compliant, and technical support to help them connect. We want to make telehealth visits accessible and easier for all.

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