

# PFCA

## Wellness Update

PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES, LLC

WINTER 2021

## Telehealth in 2022

As we have learned to live with all the changes created by the COVID 19 pandemic, the medical community and patients alike have embraced telemedicine as a solution. At Princeton Family Care Associates, we estimated that at least 80% of our telehealth appointments occur without incident. We find that patients seem to prefer the ease of virtual telemedicine visits over driving to the office.

The question is, how much longer will insurance companies reimburse telehealth appointments at the same rate as in-person appointments?

During the pandemic, Medicare, the federal health insurance program serving mostly people over 65, has raised its telehealth rates and plans to keep them in place until 2023. The New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance, the state governing body which oversees all insurance carriers in New Jersey, has issued a bulletin that requires insurance carriers to reimburse telehealth visits at the same rate as office visits. This order is due to expire January 11, 2022. New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, has recently rejected a bill that would reimburse doctors and other medical professionals the same rate for telehealth services as for in-person

Continued on page 2

Welcome to our Winter issue. We hope to continue to share topics that are timely and relevant to psychiatric care in general and more specifically to our Princeton Family Care Associates patients.

## Message from Dr. Fernandez

### Scales...Again?!

If you have been a patient of this practice for any length of time, you are quite familiar with a request from the front desk staff requesting you to complete a set of scales before one of your follow-up appointments. Why is it that your verbal report alone does not suffice? Why is it necessary to repeat the scales over and over again?

The scales provide the clinician an objective appraisal of your clinical condition, much like a reading of your blood pressure and pulse permit an objective assessment of your clinical condition when you visit your primary care doctor.

Why is it that your report, your subjective experience of symptoms, is not enough for the clinician to assess and treat you?

Unfortunately, particularly when it comes to psychiatric symptoms, patients will often tend to *underreport* their clinical symptoms, often reporting “feeling better”, but the real question is, “how much better?” Feeling “better” is what we clinically call a “*response*” to treatment. At this practice, a response is only the first step.

At PFCA, our goal is not only response, but *remission*. Remission is the total

### Scales Protocol at PFCA

- ✗ At the initial evaluation.
- ✗ Regularly, until remission is achieved.
- ✗ Every 3 months for 1-2 years after remission is achieved.
- ✗ At least once yearly while in remission.
- ✗ When patient reports a return of psychiatric symptoms.

resolution of your symptoms so that you are well again...not just better, but *well*, as our practice motto states.

The scales are indicative that we do not settle for you feeling better. They assure that any symptoms you are still having are clearly and objectively within the norms for the general population; that your psychiatric “blood pressure” is again back to normal.

So, put up with us and our frequent requests for scales. It is not our intent to burden you, but a measure of our intent to heal you from your symptoms; to expedite your return to a normal life.

Enjoy the other articles in this issue and we wish all of you a peaceful and joyful holiday season.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Fernandez*

# Mental Wellness Tips for the Upcoming Holiday Season

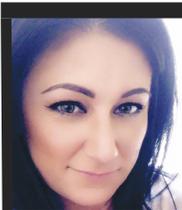
The holiday season is upon us; a time of cheer, love, and family, but also a time of stress, anxiety, and sadness for many. It is certainly wonderful to celebrate the holidays with your loved ones, but it can be overwhelming with all the shopping, cooking, cleaning, and entertain-

ing to do. On top of the usual holiday stress, the corona virus may also be complicating your holiday plans.

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Use the following practical tips to minimize your stress, and maximize your enjoyment this holiday season:

<b>Acknowledge Your Feelings:</b>	It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings.
<b>Reach Out:</b>	If feeling isolated, seek community support; religion, support groups, social media, friends, family, volunteer.
<b>Be Realistic:</b>	As families grow and change, so too do traditions.
<b>Set Aside Differences:</b>	Try to accept others as they are; they are probably feeling the holiday stress too.
<b>Stick to a Budget:</b>	Money does not buy happiness; stick to a budget before shopping, or try these alternatives; donate to charity, give homemade gifts, start a family gift exchange.
<b>Plan Ahead:</b>	Plan your holiday activities ahead so you are not scrambling at the last minute.
<b>Learn to Say No:</b>	Friends will understand if you can't attend every holiday event; don't overwhelm yourself.
<b>Don't Abandon Healthy Habits:</b>	Try not to overindulge by following these suggestions; eat a healthy snack before meals, get plenty of sleep, daily physical activity, deep breathing exercises, avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol, or drug use, and limit reading news/social media.
<b>Take a Breather:</b>	Take time for yourself, even just 15 minutes, to do what you enjoy; stargazing, listening to music, reading a book.
<b>Seek Professional Help:</b>	Seek a mental health professional if feelings of depression or anxiety persist.

*Mayo Clinic (2020, Dec 11). Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.*



## Introducing a New Clinician: Amy Derrick, RN

Ms. Derrick will be joining PFCA the end of November. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Nursing degree concentrating in Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP). She has spent her entire nursing career working in psychiatric emergency medicine helping patients receive psychiatric and substance use disorder care. She has also been a

traveling RN working in a variety of emergency departments along the east coast and has recently returned to her home state of New Jersey.

Making a difference is her main inspiration for wanting to pursue a lifelong career in mental health. She welcomes the opportunity to be a part of Princeton Family Care Associates, and hopes to be a contributing part of your clinical care.

# Telehealth

*Continued from page 1*

appointments, citing the cost may be too steep for taxpayers and may limit opportunities for patients who may prefer office visits. Murphy did call for maintaining the higher reimbursement rates until 2023, so that the state Health Department could study its usage and determine if patients are getting the kind of care they need, and if costs are reasonable. January 11, 2022, however, remains as the current deadline.

In Pennsylvania, Senate Bill 705, State's Telemedicine Act, introduced by Sen. Elder Vogel, Jr., will establish the infrastructure for telemedicine coverage reimbursement, define what healthcare personnel could provide these services, and mandate for full insurance reimbursement of telemedicine services, the same as an in-person visit. It is yet to be signed and approved by Governor Wolf.

We are aware, via a conversation with an Aetna supervisor, that Aetna plans to discontinue reimbursing their members for telehealth at the same rate as in-person effective January of 2022. We can speculate that other states are also grappling with establishing telemedicine laws, the outcome is yet to be determined.

We advise you to contact your insurance carrier and inquire about any changes to your telehealth appointment reimbursement. If you learn that you will not be reimbursed as before and choose to come in-person, contact the office to make arrangements to schedule your upcoming visit in person.

You may want to contact your local legislator to support the continuance of reimbursement for telemedicine services.

*Reference: Susan K. Livio, NJ Advance Media & Rolando Vega, For The Philadelphia Inquirer*