Release: Oct. 1, 2020
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St. Francis Medical Center Expands Telehealth Options
to Improve Patients’ Access to Care

St. Francis Internal Medicine Physician Urges Patients Not to Delay Care

TRENTON, NJ – The COVID-19 pandemic is quickly changing how doctors see their patients and provide care. At St. Francis Medical Center, doctors are increasingly using telehealth, also known as telemedicine, to connect with patients by video or online chat. This can be done through a computer, smart phone, or tablet.

“Our telehealth platform provides patients with online access to doctors 24/7,” says Arif Hussain, MD, an Internal Medicine physician at St. Francis Medical Center. “Our telehealth patients have shared that they enjoy the ease and convenience of virtual visits. Most telehealth visits are done from the comfort of the patient’s home.”

Not only does telehealth save time, but it has the ability to break down geographic barriers too, which can be crucial for patients. “Some patients do not have access to transportation,” explains Dr. Hussain. “Telehealth allows the patient to access the care they need without the worry of commuting back and forth from the physician’s office.”

St. Francis offers three telehealth options. Each connects patients to an experienced healthcare provider over their computer, smart phone or tablet.

St. Francis’ telehealth options include:

1. An online chat where patients’ questions are answered online
2. A video office visit with a provider
3. A COVID-19 screening to determine risk level and next steps

For the online chat and COVID-19 screening, no appointment is necessary.

For the video office visit, patients simply call the physician’s office and request a virtual appointment. The patient is then given a secure link or phone number to use at the designated time to be connected with their doctor.

To access all three options, or to get more information on each option, patients are asked to visit the St. Francis website at www.stfrancismedical.org.
Examples of telehealth visits can include sore throat, congestion, pink eye, rashes, muscle pulls, and follow-up care, just to name a few.

“A virtual video visit is similar to what you’d experience in an office,” says Dr. Hussain. “Patients receive a high-level of care through telehealth office visits. We can examine areas over the phone, ask questions and if needed, then prescribe medication.”

Dr. Hussain says that he and other healthcare providers work hard to make patients feel comfortable during telehealth visits. “Patients should know that they can share their medical concerns with the assurance that their information is secure and confidential through our virtual office visits.”

In the case of a COVID-19 screening, doctors can assess patients with minor symptoms and refer them to a testing site if needed. For patients with more severe symptoms, doctors can issue a referral to a hospital. “In this way, we can alert the hospital that a possible COVID-19 patient is coming so they can best prepare,” says Dr. Hussain. “It’s important, especially during this time that we have coordinated care across facilities.”

Mental health has also been a key issue during the pandemic, with a spike in anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Telehealth works well for both new patients and those who want to continue with care but are nervous about in-person visits.

Dr. Hussain regularly gets positive feedback about telehealth from patients. “People really like this option” he says. “It allows us to expand how healthcare can be accessed and provided.”