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Contact: Cynthia Townsend
cynthia.townsend@globalhealth.com
(Office) 918.878.7335

GlobalHealth Encourages Oklahomans to Utilize Telehealth to Stay Current with Doctor Appointments and Reduce Strain on Health Care Systems During COVID-19

Oklahoma Medicare beneficiaries can receive their Annual Wellness Visit (AWV) via telehealth

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. – GlobalHealth, an Oklahoma-based health insurer, is sharing information regarding telehealth and how Oklahomans, especially Medicare beneficiaries, can take steps to stay current with their doctor appointments. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the flu season presenting challenges for many to be able to see their doctor in person, telehealth is a great option for Oklahomans to maintain their continuity of care.

Telehealth is the use of electronic information and communication technologies to provide health care when a patient and their doctor can't be in the same place at the same time. This includes but is not limited to a "virtual visit" with a health care provider. Virtual visits let the provider give care to their patient when the patient is at home, on vacation, or has a busy schedule.

According to the CDC, telehealth can help improve patient health outcomes. Telehealth can also help lessen the strain on health care systems by lowering the surge of patient demand on facilities and reduce the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by health care providers.

According to telehealth.hhs.gov, recent federal policy changes now allow patients to receive care using tools that many already use. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, doctors may use popular video chat platforms with patients – including Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, Zoom, or Skype. GlobalHealth suggests patients check with their doctor to clarify what their office uses for virtual visits.

“I encourage Oklahomans to seek out telehealth appointments with their providers to ensure they do not allow their appointments to lapse if they cannot see their physician in person,” said Dr. Wesley Williams, Medical Director at GlobalHealth. “Equally important is for Medicare beneficiaries to get their Annual Wellness Visit (AWV) timely each year. I provide AWVs to many of my patients via telehealth. Preventative treatment is just as essential as treating chronic conditions. With the challenges of the pandemic and flu season, telehealth is another viable tool in medicine to ensure patients get the timely care they need.”

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services issued a brief last July titled *Medicare Beneficiary Use of Telehealth Visits: Early Data from the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic* citing that in February of 2020, no Oklahoma Medicare beneficiaries were reported to have used telehealth for primary care visits. But by April of 2020, of the reported 174,274 total primary care visits by Medicare beneficiaries in Oklahoma, more than a third were conducted via telehealth.

Utilizing telehealth can allow you to:

- Talk to your doctor in real time over the phone or a secure video chat on a computer or other smart device,
- Send and receive messages from your doctor using chat messaging, email, secure messaging and secure file exchange, and
- Use remote patient monitoring so your doctor can check on you at home.

Benefits of telehealth can include:

- Accessing care at home, especially for those who can't easily get to their doctors' offices
- Helping avoid negative consequences from delayed preventive, chronic or routine care for those who are medically or socially vulnerable or who do not have access to providers
- Scheduling same-day appointments in many cases
- Getting care after office hours
- Providing more support for people who are managing their health conditions, especially chronic conditions
- Removing the barriers of travel in bad weather or taking time off from work
- Reducing potential infectious exposures to COVID-19 and the flu
- Lowering the strain on health care systems during the COVID pandemic and flu season

There are many types of care that can be used via telehealth:

- General and preventative health care such as an Annual Wellness Visit (AWV) for Medicare beneficiaries
- Follow-up after hospitalization
- Management of chronic conditions
- Medication management
- Mental health counseling
- Nutrition counseling
- Specialist consultations
- Urgent care conditions, such as sinusitis, urinary tract infections, common rashes, pink eye, etc.

About GlobalHealth

GlobalHealth is changing health insurance in Oklahoma by providing genuine care and optimal health for the members it serves. As an industry leader, GlobalHealth is an Oklahoma-based health insurance provider covering individuals in all 77 Oklahoma counties. Working proactively with its members, GlobalHealth engages a personalized management plan to address their specific needs and ensure the best possible health outcomes. GlobalHealth utilizes cutting-edge, predictive data technology as a foundation to deliver improved health care as part of its commitment to making health insurance more affordable. Its membership includes individuals who are eligible for Medicare, state, education and municipal employees and federal employees. To learn more, visit www.GlobalHealth.com.