

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Telehealth: Ethical Considerations for Behavioral Health Providers and Support Workers

Karen L. Fortuna, PhD, LICSW

Dartmouth College

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Central East (HHS Region 3)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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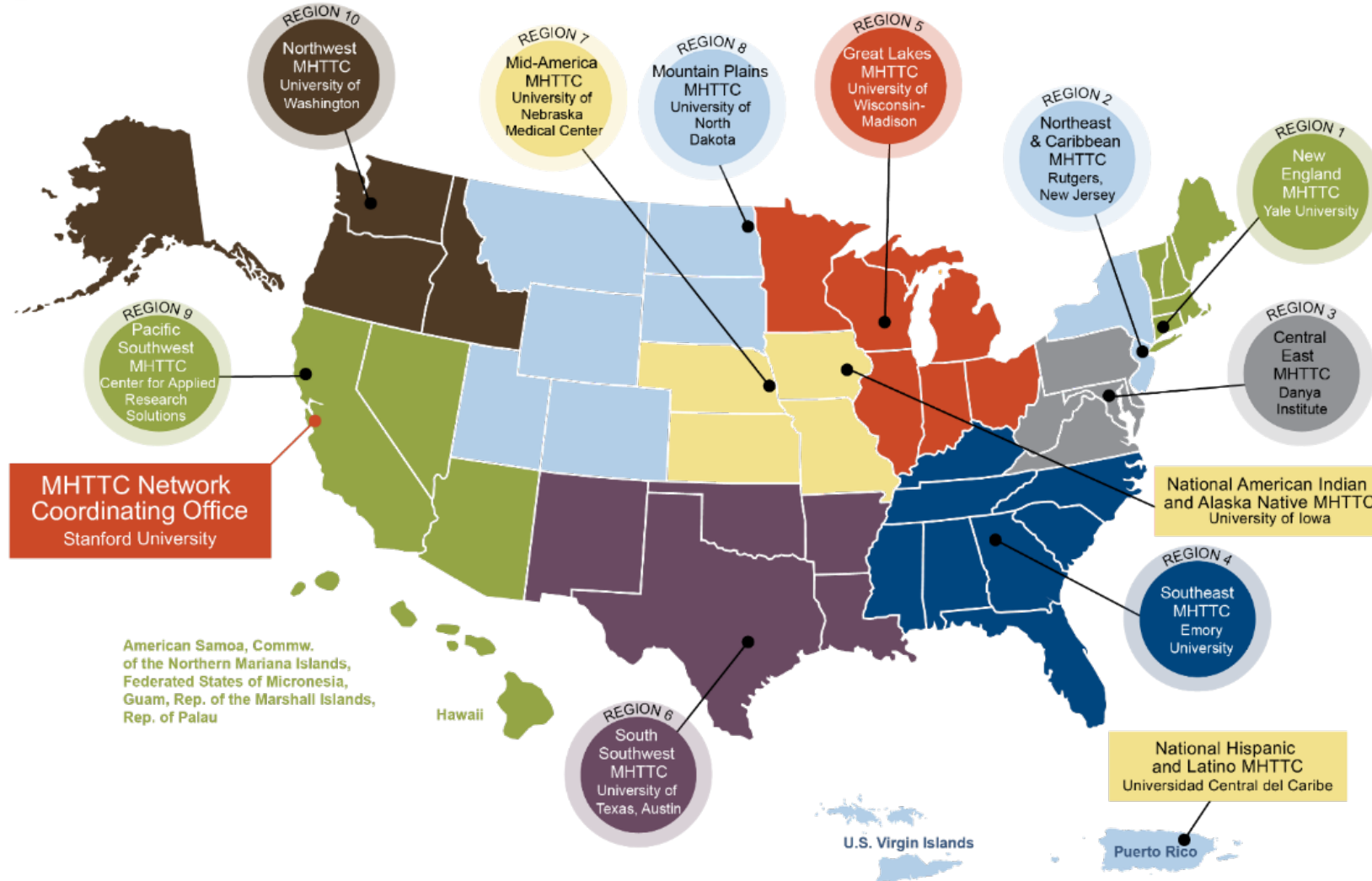


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MHTTC Purpose

The MHTTC Network vision is to unify science, education and service to transform lives through evidence-based and promising treatment and recovery practices in a recovery-oriented system of care.

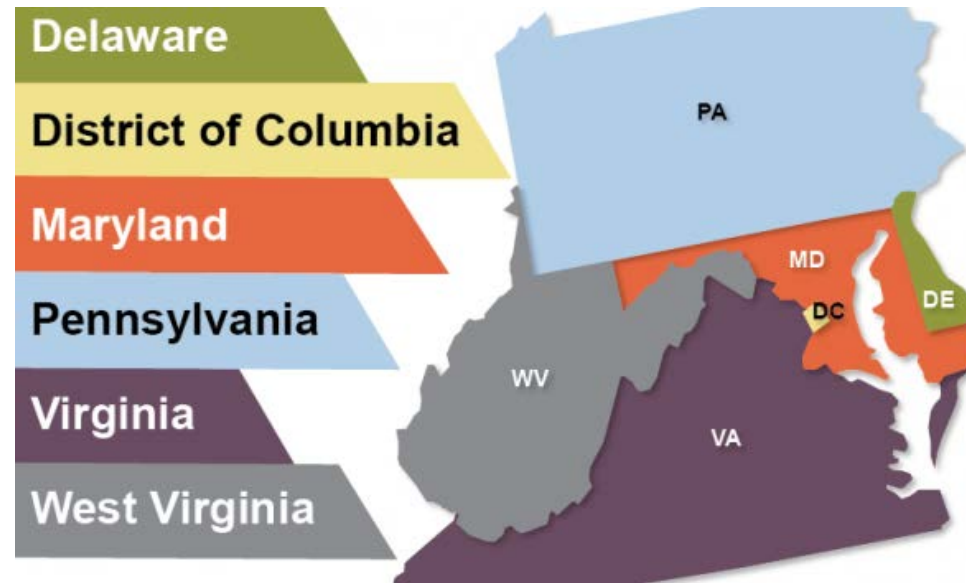


Central East MHTTC Goals

Funded by SAMHSA to:

- **Accelerate** the adoption and implementation of mental health related evidence-based practices
- **Heighten** the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the behavioral health workforce
- **Foster** alliances among culturally diverse practitioners, researchers, policy makers, family members, and consumers
- **Ensure** the availability and delivery of publicly available, free of charge, training and technical assistance

Central East Region 3



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Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Telehealth: Ethical Considerations for Behavioral Health Providers and Support Workers

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Agenda

- Confidentiality
- Regulations
- Ethical considerations
- Consent procedures
- Aligning practice with policies

What is Telehealth?

- The use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support and promote long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, and public health and health administration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021)
 - Telehealth services may be provided, for example, through audio, text messaging, or video communication technology, including videoconferencing software

Digital Professionalism



Video: Reporter caught not wearing pants during live broadcast

Consent

- Telehealth services may be provided, for example, through audio, text messaging, or video communication technology, including videoconferencing software
- SMS texting is a violation of HIPAA Rules if the text messages contain any protected health information for which a patient had not given their consent

Confidentiality

- Private settings, such as a doctor in a clinic or office connecting to a patient who is at home or at another clinic. Providers should always use private locations and patients should not receive telehealth services in public or semi-public settings, absent patient consent or exigent circumstances.
- Precautions could include using lowered voices, not using speakerphone, or recommending that the patient move to a reasonable distance from others when discussing protected health information.

Privacy: Email

- Unlike face-to-face, technology is *more* vulnerable to unintended breaches/losses than in-person communication (Elhai & Frueh, 2016).
 - Human error
 - Malicious acts

Privacy: Email

- Case Study



Privacy: Text Messaging

- Text messaging (aka, texting or SMS) is widely utilized across multiple domains of treatment services
 - Psychoeducation
 - Appointment reminders
 - Treatment supplementation
 - Delivering interventions
 - Peer support

Privacy: Text Messaging

- Case Study



Privacy: Apps & Social Media

- According to the latest estimates, 165,000–325,000 health and wellness apps are available, and over 10,000 apps are designed for mental health (Carlo et al., 2019).
- Many clients report privacy concerns, which inhibit and discourage use of health-related apps (VonHoltz et al., 2015)

Privacy: Apps

- Case Study



Privacy: Tele/video-conferencing

- Tele/video-conferencing has rapidly expanded in recent decades given the ability to mitigate costs and increase access to mental health services.
 - Offsets barriers to access
 - Rural location, physical health condition, and transportation barriers.

Privacy: Tele/video-conferencing

- Case study

pro·fes·sion·al·ism

(noun)

the competence or skill expected of a professional.

Passwords

- Some common phone user behaviors can increase risks of loss or theft, such as leaving their non-password protected device unattended or carrying the device in less secure ways (e.g., handbag or backpack).
 - Numerical passwords
 - Autofill on shared devices

Storage

- Cloud storage allowed for greater ease of access to files across devices, locations, and providers.
- The movement of records to the cloud reduces the risk of fire, flood, natural disaster, and theft/loss associated with local hard drives and/or hardcopy, paper records
 - HIPAA compliant storage
 - BAA

Equitable Distribution of Care

- Smartphone and broadband technology access
 - Commercial efforts
 - Government efforts

Ethics: Lack of Visual Cues

- Shared physical presence can provide things such as a feeling of safety, support, and motivation that may be unrelated to visual cues (Graetz et al., 1998)
- Speech contains a rich array of non-verbal information in the form of inflection, tone of voice, pauses, etc. (Lago, 1996).
- Feeling of freedom from the clinician's judgmental gaze that is disinhibiting and favors self-disclosure (Laszlo et al., 1999), reduce intimidation and reluctance to seek professional help (Doze et al., 1999)

The New York Times

***Doctor on Video Screen Told a Man
He Was Near Death, Leaving
Relatives Aghast***

Questions



Evaluation

[Evaluation Link](#)

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Appreciation



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[Central East MHTTC website](#)
[Oscar Morgan, Project Director](#)

[Danya Institute website](#)
[Email](#)
240-645-1145