National Non-profit Organization Turns to Telehealth to Help Mitigate Coronavirus Outbreak

Parents as Teachers seeks to ensure evidence-based home visits reach families to provide answers and support

ST. LOUIS, MO – March 18, 2020 – With intensifying concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC), the nation’s foremost internationally-recognized early childhood home visiting model, is scaling up its home visiting capabilities by leveraging interactive video conferencing technology to deliver its traditional on-ground visits during the pandemic. PATNC’s programs reach nearly 200,000 families worldwide.

Scaling virtual services has always been part of the non-profit’s plan, but due to the crisis, PATNC has decided to take the project out of the piloting phase and to launch its availability to its partner sites nationwide. The use of virtual visits as an interim delivery mode of in-person visits will serve as a vehicle to support the continuity of existing services to families, as well as helping to contain the spread of the infection in the community.

Just as the telemedicine industry is attempting to reach families in their homes, virtual home visiting connects families to services via laptop, tablet, or smartphone, while safe at home. Yesterday, the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) approved the use of virtual home visits during the crisis.

“Parents as Teachers is often a source of steady support during an emergency,” said Constance Gully, PATNC’s president and CEO. “Social isolation and coping with the crisis while parenting is a challenge. Our programs primarily serve families living with limited resources and little access to systems of support. By using video technology, our affiliate organizations can continue to provide services to families with, we hope, minimal disruption.”

Professional home visitors partner with families to share information on development-centered parenting, parent-child interaction, and family well-being. These supports are critical in this time where parental and child stress, and the need for resources, are increasing. Changes in
routines and increased stress can impact children's behavior, putting them at a higher risk for child abuse and neglect.

“There are things we can do to reduce traumatic stress and isolation for pregnant and parenting families during this time,” Gully said, adding, “We're not just going virtual. We're maintaining critical relationships with families who are often living on the fringes. We must remain in contact with them during the pandemic.”

Gully said home visitors are a source of reliable information and reassurance for parents; moreover, PATNC’s home visiting program is research-proven to improve parenting practices, reduce abuse and neglect, and improve family health and well-being.

PATNC has been testing virtual home visiting feasibility in partnership with Dr. Dorian Traube from the University of Southern California’s (USC) Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and Telehealth Clinic. The project demonstrated robust findings in both feasibility and parent satisfaction.

Ninety-one percent of parents who participated in the project reported feeling that the program increased their knowledge of child development, and was motivated to try new parenting strategies.

PATNC has more than 4,849 professional home visitors, known as model certified parent educators, and 1,036 affiliate organizations that implement the evidence-based home visiting model across the United States.

“Potentially, they could all go virtual for the next several months,” said Angela Rau, a PATNC virtual home visiting specialist.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Please feel free to include any of this information into on-going reports about the COVID-19 outbreak. Constance Gully is available for interviews to discuss in detail PATNC’s approach to helping parents address this unprecedented crisis. We can also arrange for you to interview a family who has used PATNC’s interactive video conferencing technology.

About Parents as Teachers
Parents as Teachers builds strong communities, thriving families and children that are healthy, safe and ready to learn by matching parents and caregivers with trained professionals who make regular personal home visits during a child’s earliest years in life, from pregnancy through kindergarten. The internationally-recognized evidence-based home visiting model is backed by 35 years of research-proven outcomes for children and families. PAT serves nearly 200,000 families in all 50 U.S. states, 115 Tribal organizations, six other countries, and one U.S. territory. Parents As Teachers National Center, Inc., is a non-profit organization headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri.