

# Choices Mental Health Counseling PLLC

## Telehealth Policy and Procedures

### Program Policies and Business Considerations

Clinical leadership within the Choices Mental Health Counseling PLLC supports a TH program and supports development efforts. This document states the policy and outlines procedures for quality care during the provision of TH practices.

### Practice Procedures

***Scheduling and patient check-in (patient, practitioner, and room).*** Either in response to an email or telephone request, patients are given an appointment and are scheduled in Office Ally. Using the functionality of that EHR system, \_\_ days before the appointment, patients receive an automated reminder by text, email, and voice (cell and home). Email reminders contain a link to the TH platform.

***Documentation and record keeping of care provided via telepractice.*** Progress notes and other clinical records are documented in the EHR in the same format as face-to-face treatment records.

***Access to patient records at both originating and distant sites (electronic and paper).*** EHR records are strictly limited to the clinician who created the record. Paper records are maintained in locked office filing cabinets, secured in a locked file room with access limited to the clinician who created the records and an office manager.

***Role of support staff (collecting vital signs, setting up equipment, and making video connection for each scheduled session, responding to emergency, etc.)*** The clinical provider is responsible for setting up all telehealth equipment and responses to emergencies.

***Communication interruptions and contingency plans.*** According to the TH informed consent: *"If the session is interrupted and you are not having an emergency, disconnect from the session and I will attempt to re-contact you via the Telemental Health platform on which we agreed to conduct therapy. If you do not receive a call back within two (2) minutes, then call me at 845-513-5002. If there is a technological failure and we are unable to resume the connection, you will only be charged the prorated amount of actual session time. TIP: If you are not plugged in, be sure your device is fully charged and/or be close to somewhere you can plug in. If you are tethering to get the internet, be sure your phone is also fully charged and that you are ready to plug in if it starts to go dead."*

### Physical Environment.

***Location (privacy, proximity for escort or emergency situations).*** The provider at the remote site is based in a professional office environment at 433 Broadway, Monticello, New York 12701. Computer equipment is physically secured in a locked room and password protected. In an emergency or in the evening, the provider may be located elsewhere (such as working from a home office) where security measures that are equivalent to the aforementioned office site will be maintained.

***Room setting: Lighting, backdrop, furniture.*** The room at 433 Broadway is indirectly lit by incandescent fixtures in the ceiling and lamps with a professional office environment of care.

**Protection of patient confidentiality at both originating and distant sites; including obtaining any applicable patient consents.** PHI is maintained in a password protected, end-to-end encrypted, HIPAA-compliant EHR (Office Ally) and cloud services including G-Suite and MS Office 365. Paper documents are maintained in locked file cabinets in a locked file room.

The Informed Consent for Telemental Health states: *“Records: The Telemental Health sessions shall not be recorded in any way unless agreed to in writing by mutual consent. I will maintain a written record of our session in the same way I maintain records of in-person sessions in accordance with my policies, as is required of me by law.”*

### **Emergency Procedures.**

The following relevant sections appear in the TH Informed Consent:

- A.) *“Crisis management and intervention. Usually, I will not engage in Telemental Health with clients who are currently in a crisis situation requiring high levels of support and intervention. In any event, we will have an emergency response plan to address potential crisis situations that may arise during the course of our Telemental Health work.” \* \* \**
- B.) *“Treatment is most effective when clinical discussions occur at your regularly scheduled sessions. But if an urgent issue arises, you should feel free to attempt to reach me by phone. I will try to return your call within 24 hours except on weekends and holidays. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you cannot wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room.” \* \* \**
- C.) *“Emergencies and Technology: Assessing and evaluating threats and other emergencies can be more difficult when conducting Telemental Health than in traditional in-person therapy. To address some of these difficulties, we are creating an emergency plan before engaging in Telemental Health services. You must identify an emergency contact person who is near your location who I will contact in the event of a crisis or emergency to assist in addressing an emergent situation. By executing this document, you are authorizing/allowing me to contact your emergency contact person as needed during such a crisis or emergency.”*

**Process to engage with identified on-site staff should there be safety concerns.** In the event of a safety concern, available resources in the local community include Mobile Mental Health, Greater Hudson Valley Healthcare System, the Sullivan County Sheriff’s Office, local police agencies, and 911.

**Education and training related to emergency procedures at both distant and originating sites.** The provider will receive regular continuing education relative to provision of Telemental Health

### **Patient Suitability for TH; Informed Consent**

**Process for clinician determining and documenting a patient’s suitability for TH services including clinical and other factors.** Whenever practicable, all patients and prospective patients will have at least one in-person evaluation session with clinical staff prior to participation in TH. If found suitable for TH, the patient or prospective patient must execute a statement of informed consent prior to receiving services with TH. This evaluation for suitability for TH may be the same day as the first TH session.

**Confidentiality and privacy of health information.** Relevant privacy and security and policies will be followed (e.g. 45 CFR Parts 160 and 164, including HITECH breach notification procedures (HIPAA); and 43 CFR Part 2).

**Quality Review.** Quality review must be conducted on a periodic basis to identify any risks and quality issues related to:

- Equipment connectivity.
- Attempted vs. completed TH sessions.
- Patient and provider satisfaction. At every TH session the practitioner must review the patient's satisfaction with the provision of services via TH.

Supplies and provision of technical support for any equipment used to support services is provided by the clinician, with occasional assistance with such tasks as networking or installations by Kristt Kelly Office Systems Corp. of Monticello, with whom this office has a Business Associate Agreement.

### **Organizational Readiness**

Because Choices Mental Health Counseling PLLC is a solitary practice, Thomas Rue is designated as the TH coordinator and will maintain ongoing communication with relevant stakeholders, providing support for referrals, clinical decisions, program functioning, and system processes.

### ***Technical Issues***

The organization and its TH vendors have established technical specifications that promote safe and effective delivery of care, addressing areas as:

- Interoperability with partners
- Bandwidth
- Verification of data transmission
- Equipment maintenance
- On-site technical support

The selected technology model is user-friendly and provides seamless integration of patient/client data and services. The TH coordinator will maintain communication with relevant vendors to quickly resolve any technical glitches that may affect clinical outcomes.

### ***Privacy and Security Provisions***

Appropriate measures are implemented during the transmission process, including:


- Authentication.
- Patient/client identification.
- Data control and tracking.
- WiFi protected access.

Policies and procedures are established and implemented in office practices and as outlined in vendor Business Associate Agreements to protect the confidentiality of patient/client information, including:

- Electronic privacy (e.g. use of passwords and encryption).
- Physical site security.

- Safeguarding confidentiality of store-and-forward images and other patient/client records.
- Agreements for all personnel involved in TH.

Provider's TH documentation formats are standardized and integrated with electronic patient/client health information records so that the patient's telehealth records are retained and accessible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas S. Rue', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas S. Rue, MA, LMHC, CASAC, NCC, CCMHC, DCMHS, SAP  
Sole Member, CHOICES MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING PLLC

Dated: May 5, 2020  
Monticello, New York