

Wyoming Telehealth Network December Provider Spotlight Kerian Duncan

Kerian Duncan, PT, DPT, MSc, has a special way with children and their parents through her practice. Now she has her sights set on utilizing telehealth as a way to further connect with her patients while still reaching for optimal health outcomes. Her resume is impressive, as she is a pediatric physical therapist and post professional trainee currently for the Utah Regional Leadership Education for Neurodevelopmental Disorders (URLEND) program. She has participated in NIH funded research to study sensory deficits and sensory reweighting as it pertains to trunk control in children with moderate to severe disabilities. Kerian's primary interests are in visual and vestibular deficits seen in children with moderate to severe neurological disorders. We caught up with her recently to learn more about her plans for telehealth and how she intends to get started.



I. When did you first hear about telehealth? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?

Kerian Duncan: I first heard about telehealth for psychology and MD related “check in” appointments. I had not really thought of it related to physical therapy until earlier this year when COVID-19 came to the USA. I was skeptical at first, primarily because I was unsure how insurance companies would reimburse for this service as a DPT. I was also

skeptical because much of my job as a physical therapist can be very “physical” or hands on. I feel and intuit with my hands, especially when working with orthopedic patients. I was not sure if it would work for my profession. My opinion has totally changed! I now realize how many doors of creativity this opens for us as providers and patients, and how much more access patients can have to services, especially if they live in rural areas. I relocated to Wyoming one year ago and found out how many communities have to drive long distances (often in winter months, on I-80) to receive specialized care. I did not feel confident that I would be able to ever offer specialized care because of this, and felt that moving to Wyoming meant I needed to be a generalist in the small community that I reside in. I love pediatrics and neurodevelopment! I feel so many families will be able to benefit from telehealth intervention that would otherwise not have the opportunity to. It really has opened so many doors for families, and for myself in this profession. I now feel confident that I could specialize in pediatrics here since my lens has now broadened to access the entire state I am licensed to practice in.

2. When did you begin offering telehealth services? What prompted the need to offer these services?

Kerian: I have started a virtual pediatric physical therapy clinic (The Intuitive Parents Physical Therapy, check out the website: www.theintuitiveparents-pt.com) that will begin accepting patients officially on January 15th, 2021. The clinic will focus on Early Intervention using the parent-coaching model, as telehealth offers the perfect vehicle to get families more involved with their child’s care. I realized a huge need for services when I moved to Wyoming only one year ago and so many families do not have access to consistent care. I am one of very few pediatric physical therapists within hundreds of miles. With telehealth becoming more accepted as a competent model of care, I feel this is the way of now and the future to improve access to quality parent education, care, and community.

3. What motivates you to continue offering telehealth services?

Kerian: I just love how much of an opportunity it is to implement the parent coaching model of pediatric physical therapy, which is still somewhat of a mystery in the therapy world. I love how much more involved parents get to be and how much that translates into consistent care and faster, long lasting, improvements with therapy.

4. What is your proudest accomplishment with telehealth?

Kerian: While I have not begun officially offering services through my virtual clinic, I am looking forward to the relationships that will be formed with parents in a new way; a way that differs from the typical outpatient model of pediatric PT. I look forward to forming a really great community for these parents who feel overwhelmed and disempowered with raising a child with special health care needs.

5. What advice would you give patients wanting to try telehealth?

Kerian: The telehealth model offers the opportunity for children to have intensive care and frequent access to appropriate providers. It tears down barriers that once prevented adequate access. Please give this way of treatment a try, especially if you are a parent of a child with needs in age range of Birth to 5 years old.

6. What advice would you give providers wanting to start offering telehealth?

Kerian: Just do it! There will be certain patient populations that are not appropriate for telehealth services, but for the most part, it is a model that can be used in all provider clinics in some way. There are more and more telehealth training programs coming to the forefront, so it will begin to be easier to implement.

7. What was the biggest barrier in providing telehealth services? Have you overcome it?

Kerian: There are parents that are accepting of this model of care, and parents that are simply unable to do it. Some caregivers have ailments themselves, limiting how much they can be an active and engaged e-helper in the coaching model. Some caregivers are not able to afford computer and Internet to access this type of care. These are still barriers that need to be overcome across the state with improved funding for caregivers.

As a therapist, the biggest barrier is insurance reimbursement for physical therapy telehealth services. I am not sure how this will affect consistency of care for kiddos. I am doing something novel in my virtual clinic and that is a subscription-based model of payment for parents, instead of a fee-for-service model. This allows consistent affordable care, rather than what happens when insurance companies no longer reimburse for services. I truly believe this will be a better way for kids to have access during these important first years of life.

8. How do you think implementing telehealth now will affect how things will be done at your organization after the pandemic is over?

Kerian: With the start of a new clinic, I feel this is truly the way of the future. The pandemic forced us to uncover new ways of operating. The benefits surpass the restrictions we have during the pandemic. I hope that in Early Intervention therapies, this is the ultimate way that we implement the parent-coaching model and routine-based intervention in the child's natural environment for our services.

9. Is there anything you learned the hard way in telehealth implementation?

Kerian: Truly accepting the parent-coaching model and being creative with intervention is so crucial, but has been difficult. Going from being very hands on and playing directly with children to doing parent coaching (different from parent education) is difficult but more rewarding in the end.

10. Do you have any telehealth hacks or tricks?

Kerian: Take breaks from your screen and incorporate those breaks frequently throughout the day. There are lots of resources online that are helpful for providers (if you seek them out) that will help this process to not be a mystery.

Bonus Question: Do you have a favorite podcast, book, or author?

Kerian: One of the best books I have read this year is "Sacred Woman" by Queen Afua. This book is so good for holistic healing practices and improved overall pelvic and female health. I have already read it 3 times. I also have basic training in pelvic floor physical therapy. I have a goal to someday work closely with birth Doulas in offering those services to expecting moms as well. This would be part of my action towards preventing the rise of children born with disabilities.