MANAGING A STUDENT-RUN CLINIC DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS:
Collaboration between EHHOP and Shade Tree

       Since the WHO report of "Pneumonia of Unknown Cause" from Wuhan, China was released on December 31st 2019, our healthcare system has undergone remarkable changes to adapt to the rapid spread of COVID-19. One important aspect of these changes has been the widespread suspension of direct patient contact for students in order to: ensure patient, student, and staff safety; conserve PPE for essential hospital operations; and limit the spread of COVID-19. These present significant challenges for Student-Run Free Clinics (SRFCs) that provide essential services to the most vulnerable patients, who are also the most likely to be affected by this pandemic. Therefore, it is crucial that SRFCs try to maintain their services as much as possible while adhering to the institutional guidelines of their home institutions.

       Telehealth has emerged as a promising avenue for delivering patient care while reducing patient contact for many healthcare systems. At our home institutions, the rapid implementation of telehealth protocols has allowed for both reduced patient traffic to clinics and remote monitoring of suspected cases of COVID-19. Its importance in the new clinic workflow was also highlighted in a webinar hosted by the Society for Student-Run Free Clinics (SSRFC), where various clinics presented their own protocols for implementing telehealth. Yet, incorporating telehealth may seem like a daunting challenge to many clinics, as many students and providers are new to the platform.

       The East Harlem Health Outreach Partnership (EHHOP), affiliated with the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, was one of the first SRFCs to be affected by the pandemic and implemented a new telehealth protocol in March 2020. EHHOP currently offers fully virtual visits for medical, ancillary, and social services. In order to share our experience with telehealth with the rest of the SRFC community, we have summarized our current protocol into a toolkit that other clinics can reference. This document was created in collaboration with the Shade Tree Clinic, affiliated with the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, who have done amazing work in implementing telehealth and COVID-19 screening protocols at their clinic.

       This toolkit has 2 components: the FAQ and the Sample Protocols. The FAQ document has answers to numerous questions we have received from other clinics regarding telehealth, clinic flow, ancillary services, and many others. The sample protocols provide a snapshot view of our clinic flow during the week and on clinic day. There is also an additional Tips section in the Clinic Day-Snapshot flow diagram, to provide as much detail as possible on this topic. We hope this will be useful for SRFCs around the country as a starting point for incorporating telehealth into your workflow both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.