



Virtual Care: A case study on a midwifery perspective on video visits

Virtual care enables midwives to connect with expectant mothers and conduct the intake appointment via video using a secure virtual care platform. Virtual care seamlessly integrates into midwifery workflows, providing uninterrupted service while reducing the risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission, and facilitating provision of family-centered maternity care.

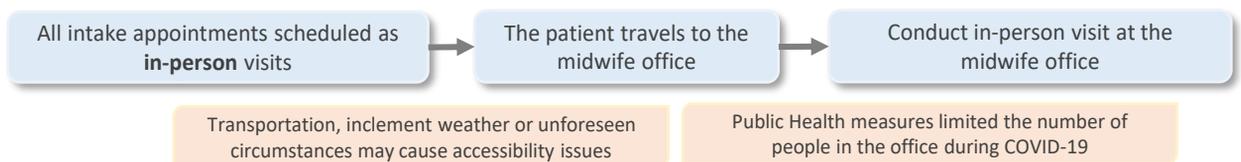
In response to the increased cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, providers throughout the healthcare system have embraced virtual care approaches as an alternative to face-to-face visits in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. While not a replacement for in-person visits, virtual care has been shown to facilitate and complement existing patterns of care.¹

Midwives play a major role for pregnant and post-partum patients, and for newborns in their first six weeks of life.² The first midwifery appointment is the longest, usually lasting sixty minutes, and includes a detailed history-taking, education regarding the midwifery model of care, and informed choice discussion regarding prenatal screening. During this appointment, the midwife establishes a personal relationship with the expectant parent, initiating continuity of care from early pregnancy to six weeks after birth.

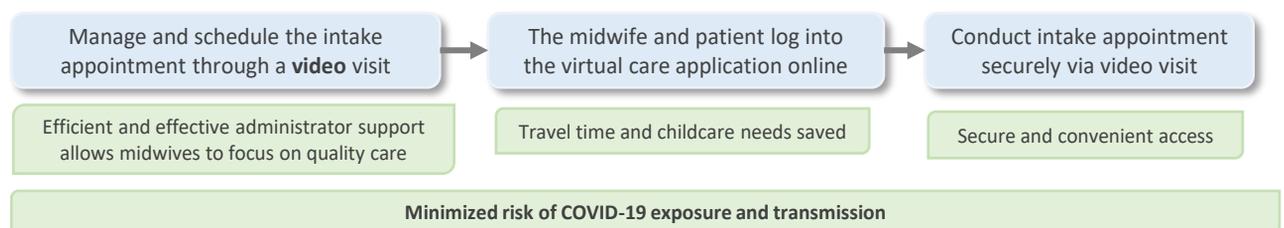
There is evidence that pregnant women are at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared to those who are not pregnant.^{3,4} Virtual care offers an opportunity to reassess and revise the number of face-to-face contacts while reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. With change management support from the eHealth Centre of Excellence in March 2020, Blue Heron Midwives adopted virtual care, with administrator support that managed the scheduling of intake visits for six midwives.

Figure 1. Midwives' workflow before and after implementing virtual care during COVID-19.

Before



After



“Video visits have met our needs to safely and efficiently facilitate the new patient intake process for midwifery care. The intake visit typically takes an hour to thoroughly gather information, provide education and begin to develop a relationship. Prior to the pandemic, we would spend this hour in-person with the patient, and possibly their partner and children.

During COVID-19, regular office visits have been shortened and the pregnant person is required to attend alone. OTN intake visits allow us to meet the patient unmasked (and their family, if they wish) and to maintain the unhurried nature of our intake appointment. One added benefit is that it relieves them of the burden of finding childcare for this initial visit. Our team found it easy to adjust to offering OTN eVisits, and still allows us to maintain high quality patient care.”

Ann Liebau, Registered Midwife, Blue Heron Midwives

In accordance with the recommendations from the World Health Organization⁵ and the Association of Ontario Midwives⁵, virtual care supported the midwifery clinic to limit the number of people inside the clinical office while enabling delivery of care to mothers-to-be during COVID-19. Since March 2020, Blue Heron Midwives **converted 100% of new patient intake appointments** to video visits, allowing initiation of care to expectant mothers. While in-person visits are still available, video visits support the midwife to continue to provide care throughout pregnancy, birth and postpartum. In addition, patients with language barriers can add an interpreter to their video visit, ensuring that the patient and midwife fully understand information and decisions. Virtual care also saves travel time for the patient where previously, one in ten, or 10%, of patients arrived late for the intake visit.



5%

Of patients require an interpreter, which can be added in to a video visit



100%

Delays, caused by late arrivals, eliminated

The midwives experienced the following benefits:



Ease of virtual care integration into midwives' workflow

- Facilitated an unmasked, face-to-face interaction in the midst of a global pandemic
- Provided continued access for patients and midwives who are self-isolating at home



Flexible appointment arrangement

- Reduced the number of staff in the office at any point in time while adhering to public health measures
- Improved appointment efficiency while maintaining quality of care and patient satisfaction



Increased access to midwifery care services

- Supported a convenient option to access a midwifery care appointment through a video visit based on the needs of the expectant mother
- Allowed women and their families to take part in the appointment from their own home
- Offered equitable access to care for 5% of mothers requiring interpretation services

“As a working mom with a toddler and another baby on the way life can be busy at times. OTN has definitely made medical appointments less stressful as I am able to do them from my own home and don't have to worry about arranging childcare or trying to corral a curious toddler while attending an in-office appointment.”

LT, Patient, Waterloo Wellington

If you have any questions or would like further information on this case study, contact communications@ehealthce.ca.

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Works Cited:

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