Until this era of social distancing, many of us had never considered telehealth services. We are now discovering that these services are often comparable to or better than in-person services, especially when physically going to see a healthcare professional may put our health at risk. Did you know that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and audiologists also can provide telehealth services referred to as telepractice? The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (www.asha.org) endorses the use of telepractice to reach people who, for various reasons, are unable to receive SLP and audiology services in person.

In fact, UNC Greensboro has been a state pioneer in telepractice since 2008 when Sena Crutchley, speech-language pathologist, started providing telepractice services at UNC Greensboro and helped to add those services to the N.C. SLPA and audiology licensure statute. Over the years, there have been many technological advances that support telepractice. Services can now be provided securely and reliably via readily available videoconferencing platforms on a home computer with a webcam and microphone, tablet, or smartphone. Fortunately, high-speed Internet options are more widely available than just a few years ago, which helps to improve connectivity. Currently, the UNC Greensboro Speech and Hearing Center provides telepractice services via WebEx due to its high level of security, reliability, and flexibility.

So, what services can be provided by SLPs and audiologists through telepractice? SLPs can evaluate and treat people with the same speech, language, and swallowing difficulties as they would in person. Audiologists provide consultations, counseling, and some hearing aid services such as fitting, programming, and troubleshooting of newer technology that has been activated for teleservices. Although telepractice can be used successfully with people of all ages, it may not be appropriate in every situation. The clinician will determine when telepractice is appropriate in order to ensure that services meet the same standards as those provided in person.

Are you wondering how SLP and audiology services can be provided effectively through videoconferencing? Similar to Facetime or Skype, the client and the clinician can see and hear each other. Telepractice platforms also allow for shared “content,” which may include showing videos, documents, or objects. Although clinicians are not able to touch their clients, they often can teach them to provide their own touch cues if necessary. We are trained to use our same knowledge and skills as SLPs and audiologists, though through this different medium. It is easy for those involved in telepractice to “forget” that they are not in person due to the experience being so engaging. Essentially, telepractice is an effective solution for those in need of SLP and audiology services, especially during these “stay-at-home” times.

If you are interested in learning more about the telepractice services that UNC Greensboro provides, please contact us at 336-334-5939 or email us at csd@uncg.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!