

TELEHEALTH @ SEI

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Shiley Eye Institute (SEI) doctors are finding ways to care safely for their patients, including telehealth. Live two-way audiovisual visits are offered with some of our providers to limit person-to-person contact. These “virtual” visits take place on a smartphone, computer or tablet using specialized software at UC San Diego Health.

Not all eye health concerns can be addressed via telehealth but we have made great efforts, particularly in triage, optometry, pediatric ophthalmology and neuro-ophthalmology.

Our first telehealth pediatric ophthalmology patient was seen on April 2, 2020 with **Shira Robbins, MD**, Professor of Ophthalmology at the Anne F. and Abraham Ratner Children’s Eye Center. From Dr. Robbins perspective:

Our video visit has a virtual waiting room where ophthalmic technicians, Marie Montez or Gustavo Wanderer, “check in the patient,” ask the reason for the visit and obtain a medical history. Orthoptist Erika Acera then performs a live eye movement exam followed by the medical examination

performed by pediatric ophthalmology fellow Kirsta Brummel, DO.

I have been watching the full visit on my computer screen so I can then ask follow up questions and perform any additional examination before providing a final diagnosis and treatment plan. Before the visit, patients are asked to check their vision with the phone application (app) Kay iSight or a paper chart that we send and to photograph their eye movements with an app called 9 Gaze. This does not replace the greater accuracy of an in-person exam but allows us to take care of our non-urgent patients in this time of pandemic.

In the Viterbi Family Department of Ophthalmology, we are always looking for better ways to care for our patients. I was lucky to have a great group at Ratner to assist me in launching this new system. Thank you to my outstanding telehealth team: Marie Montez, Gustavo Wanderer, Erika Acera, Kirsta Brummel, DO and Andrea Johnson.

When it comes to eye health, telehealth sometimes makes it challenging to diagnose and treat patients. However,

sometimes there is no alternative. A patient called with new symptoms of double vision but refused an in-person visit because of fears about COVID-19.

“I had a video visit with her that day and diagnosed a new onset sixth nerve palsy, a disorder that causes your eye to cross inward towards your nose. There are many possible causes but because she also had vertigo, I was concerned for a significant brain disease,” said Dr. Robbins. “I ordered an immediate MRI. The scan revealed a giant brain aneurysm. We then transferred the patient to neurosurgery and endovascular surgery all through telehealth. It can work with the right patient and right set up. I am so glad she called - as we likely saved her life.”

She continued, “I plan to continue some telehealth visits for certain types of patients going forward. I love that COVID-19 made me try something new which I will continue to use to care for patients long after the pandemic is over.”



SHILEY EYEMOBILE FOR CHILDREN

COVID-19 severely impacted the ability for the UC San Diego Shiley EyeMobile for Children to travel in the community to see youngsters around San Diego in the school locations. During the initial closure of schools, the EyeMobile was transformed into a mobile triage unit stationed in front of the Shiley Eye Institute and staffed by optometrists in full personal protective equipment. The doctors were able to examine patients that were suspected of having COVID-19 symptoms which allowed the Shiley clinic to remain available by limiting exposure to our other patients.

While the EyeMobile was being utilized as a triage unit, the staff completed comprehensive compliance calls to all of the families of children who wear glasses. Unfortunately, it was evident that many of the children had left their glasses in their closed classrooms. Therefore, the EyeMobile team quickly swung into action by replacing all of those glasses that were left behind. The parents were followed up with and given further information on the importance of wearing glasses and their children’s development.

We are happy to report that COVID-19 didn’t completely close down the EyeMobile. In the summer, the EyeMobile began scheduled visits to various cities in the county maintaining our mission - *that all children have access to high quality vision care*. The fact that children are not attending school in classrooms does not mean they do not need the EyeMobile services. Although a different model, the EyeMobile is continuing to provide no cost exams and glasses to children ages 3-14 in community locations around San Diego County.