

Eye medical practice still serves in coronavirus era, adds telemedicine

New and returning patients still can receive medical care from Eye Associates of the South during this coronavirus period. The long-time Mississippi Gulf Coast eye practice remained open and added online telemedicine to its appointment options, so some patients may stay at home for medical care.

On a case-by-case basis, the eye doctors assess whether patients may be seen in person or through video conferencing, as the patients' technology permits.

Telemedicine is the remote treatment and diagnosis of patients using such telecommunications technology as computers, tablets or smart phones.

"Telemedicine it is a huge addition to our practice and of great benefit to patients," said ophthalmologist Rainna Bahadur, M.D., a practice partner.

"Patients should call us and we will assess their situation and what kind of appointment they need. Since everyone is trying to stay at home, except for certain medical care, we try to help them stay home if we can.

Eye Associates of the South doctors chose to remain open to support the local medical community that is dealing with the COVID-19 virus – rather than diverting eye patients to hospital ERs, which are under pressure as it is from coronavirus cases.

Founded in 1986, Eye Associates of the South's board-certified ophthalmologists and veteran optometrist usually see patients at their clinics in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport. But during this coronavirus period, their patients only will go the Biloxi or Ocean Springs clinics, if needed.

"We are seeing patients who have pressing eye problems in the clinics. But we are postponing routine eye care, such as complete exams for eyeglasses or contacts lenses," explained ophthalmologist Debra LaPrad, also a partner in the practice.

Some of the reasons patients are receiving appointments are for vision changes; flashes and floaters; eye pain, tenderness or redness; eyelid swelling; itchy eyes; infections; lid lesions or blisters; and urgent or emergency problems.

Eye redness or conjunctivitis ("pink-eye") has been associated with an early symptom of the COVID-19 virus and rapid treatment is advised for any coronavirus symptom, according to various studies. It also may appear late in the illness.

"If you are running a fever or have flu, cold or coronavirus symptoms, it is vital that you inform us about your health in advance so we may make accommodations for your condition to protect our staff and

other patients," LaPrad said. "If you are sick and have a fever and no urgent eye problems, you should stay home and postpone your eye appointment."

Bahadur explained, in the telemedicine process, a patient calls the clinic with a complaint or issue. Then an ophthalmology technician will talk to them or call them back to get more information.

"If it is an eye problem we think we can handle with telemedicine, we will give the patient a URL address that they can go to on their computer or smart phone. That takes them to a virtual waiting room, where they Eye Associates of the South doctor will appear to guide their appointment.

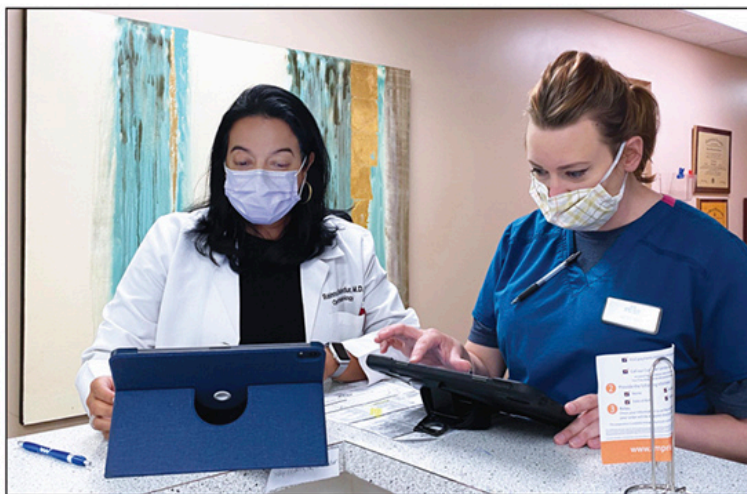
"Patients have done really well with the system we are using," Bahadur said.

"We video conference and discuss symptoms and treatment options. But we can't do refractive exams or assess problems that require us to look inside the eye, of course, remotely," she added. "In that case, we will have them come to a clinic or, if it isn't serious, postpone their appointment to a later date," LaPrad explained.

Some ongoing eye prescriptions may be renewed by phone. Contacts may be reordered by phone from existing prescriptions, she added.

Eye Associates of the South also has new clinic hours during the coronavirus period. They are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and from 8 a.m. to noon Fridays.

Please call (228) 396-5185 for an appointment or with any questions. You also may contact the practice by email at Patients@2020view.com or by filling out a message form on the CONTACT page of their website at www.2020view.com.



Biloxi ophthalmologist Rainna Bahadur, M.D. (left) conducts a telemedicine appointment with an eye patient, using video conferencing on computers. Technician Autumn Mitchell takes notes to order a prescription for the patient. Eye Associates of the South added telemedicine to help more patients during the coronavirus period.

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