

COVID-19 MEDIA COVERAGE

Pandemic providing proving ground for SA telehealth firm

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Seven weeks ago, Carenet Health wasn't fielding calls about COVID-19. It was, however, expanding its capabilities and manpower long before the novel coronavirus outbreak in China turned into a pandemic.

Now, the San Antonio-based telehealth company has a task force in place meeting twice a day, seven days a week to make sure it's moving in real time to address changing needs. And in doing so, Carenet is lifting some of the burden off hospitals and emergency centers, freeing critical capacity at brick-and-mortar facilities for more seriously ill people.

"Every patient who uses telehealth for potential symptoms gives those ER resources more time to handle patients who really need to be there," Carenet Health President [Mick Mazour](#) said.

In July, Carenet acquired North Carolina-based Citra Health Solutions' telehealth subsidiary. That transaction followed Carenet's purchase of HGS AxisPoint Health's nurse advice line services. Carenet is one of the largest telehealth companies of its kind in North America.

"Right or wrong, up to this point, in some cases people have been a little passive," Mazour said. "But this clearly puts telehealth and virtual care squarely in the forefront, highlighting the power, the flexibility and the scalability of what Carenet is all about."

Carenet CEO [John Erwin](#) said ahead of the outbreak that, with rising emergency care costs and other industry challenges, telehealth needed to be a "critical part of 2020 strategies."

The company already employs some 250 nurses and is looking to expand that workforce, reaching out to registered nurses across the country who can work remotely. It's also added behavioral health specialists and health coaches, as well as access to pharmacists.

That growth and maturation is especially important now.

"We are really trying to broaden the skill sets that we have," Mazour said. "We are trying to get out in front of this as best we can and continue to evaluate what we think the needs will be."

No one knows when the spread of COVID-19 will slow in the U.S. When it does, Mazour believes Carenet — which has relationships with more than 100 health plans and numerous health systems across the nation — will be a stronger company, uniquely positioned to handle the next health care crisis.

"We have an opportunity to be proactive and prepared through what we've learned," Mazour said.