

# Social Security Newsletter®

This is a newsletter of interest to professionals who provide services to potential Social Security disability and SSI claimants. © 2020

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## IMPORTANT: Medical Care During Pandemic

**APPROVAL OF AN** application for Social Security benefits is almost entirely dependent upon the content and source of the medical records. Medical charts are the core evidence used to decide every disability application at every level of the application and appeal process.

**WE WORK CLOSELY** with our clients to make certain they understand that it is important for their health care that they treat with the appropriate medical specialists; and, that by doing so, they are creating the records we need to prove the severity of their symptoms.



**HOWEVER, NOW WE** are in the middle of a pandemic and many medical providers are not seeing patients and hospitals are only slowly re-opening to non-COVID care. This situation may worsen if the virus issues worsen in the fall.

**THERE IS NO WAY** to predict how any particular Administrative Law Judge is going to react to a gap in medical treatment due to the closure of medical offices. The hope would be

that Judges will be realistic and understand that medical care is hard to maintain in this environment. However, we can be fairly certain that Judges who are adverse to claimants may use this gap against them.

**WHILE TELE-TREATMENT** may not be as effective as traditional office sessions, it is important. Therefore, where possible, we are encouraging clients to "tele-treat." Many doctors' offices are using telephonic and video treatment sessions to keep up with their patients. This is especially true with mental health providers. These visits will become part of the medical chart and will help document ongoing treatment and symptomology.

**THE QUARANTINE AND** social isolation has exasperated many claimants' medical conditions. For example, being confined has caused many people with orthopedic and chronic pain problems to worsen as they are not leaving the house at all. Although there may be physical therapists doing PT by video – many online videos have basic exercises that people can do at home, it does not replace in-person attention.

**IT IS WELL UNDERSTOOD** that the lack of work and social contact has worsened many mental illness issues leading to increased depression, anxiety and violence. This

has been a major concern in many communities.

**WE CAN HELP** our clients then in both ways. By encouraging treatment we can help improve their lives and decrease the chance for worsening their medical problems. At the same time the doctors and counselors are generating medical charts which can serve as evidence.

**AS ALWAYS, IT IS** critical to remind our clients to be truly honest in their discussions with the medical teams. Too often people do not want to sound like they are "complaining" or make the doctor feel bad by saying that they are still suffering. Every visit counts – doctors actually want clients to be fully descriptive of their symptoms and limitations – that allows the doctors to make better medical decisions.

**AS WE INTERACT** with people who truly need this assistance we must continue to encourage them to get their medical providers to continue treatment, and we must reinforce the need to be truly descriptive during that treatment.

### FREE ZOOM TRAINING

We have begun doing Zoom in-service sessions for groups in the community on current Social Security issues. Please contact us and we can provide training for your agency!