



# Ohio Virtual Counseling

Tackling Virtual Medicine with Kareo

Mental Health

Cara Tuley has been a practicing counselor for over 20 years. Until recently, she practiced mostly in non-profit settings, but in 2013 she decided to launch a virtual practice. After some planning and preparation, she saw her first patient at Ohio Virtual Counseling in 2014.

Ohio Virtual Counseling is an online private practice where Cara provides counseling via email, chat, audio, and video conferencing through a HIPAA and HITECH standardized program. She counsels individuals, groups, couples, and families.

## Challenge

Starting a virtual practice is a risk, and isn't for the faint of heart, but Cara sees the potential. "Virtual practice is really growing in larger areas like New York and California," she says. "And it is beginning to gain some acceptance in the rural areas like Ohio although it's slow." Still she wanted to be one of the first.

However, to be a trend setter means keeping costs low. While Cara hadn't done billing herself, she knew she would have to do it all if she was going to start a virtual private practice. She needed to find solutions that would allow her to be compliant and send electronic claims, easily accept and manage payments from self-pay patients, and manage her visit documentation.

## Solutions

Cara soon found Kareo, a practice management, billing, and EHR system that was affordable and easy to learn. "One of the things I liked most about Kareo was the integrated credit card processing," she recalls. "Insurance only covers face-to-face visits, and I also do email and chat so those are self-pay. Kareo makes it easy to collect those credit card payments as well as do my insurance billing."

So far, Cara has been able to get contracts with Aetna and Medical Mutual to provide virtual private counseling through Ohio Virtual Counseling. Some of her patients come through those payers when patients find her in the directory. For those patients she bills insurance and collects any copay or deductible amounts.

To help build her practice she is also signed up with Teladoc and American Wellness, which provide telehealth services to patients. Patients can search for a provider, request an appointment, and the service bills insurance or collects payments from the patient. Then, the service pays Cara.

## KAREO SOLUTION



Kareo Clinical



Kareo Billing



"They are so shocked that I do my own billing and **how easy it was for me to learn. And I get paid so much faster.** I get insurance payments in three weeks or less and have never had any problems with getting paid."

“I prefer to have patients who are covered by my contracted insurance payers because I get reimbursed about twice as much,” Cara explains. “And it doesn’t take me much time to do the billing.” Her hope is that as she grows her practice she can see more patients who come to her directly and are either covered or can do self-pay, but the services she participates in now are helping her build up her practice.

## Results

Right now the practice is small. Cara only sees about five patients at any given time, but the change has given her the work/life balance and flexibility she wanted. “I can see patients from home at any time of the day,” she says. “If they need early morning or night time appointments, I can do that. I can also do counseling via email for patients whose schedules make it hard to have traditional visits.”

She spends just a small amount of time on her administrative and billing tasks. “But I think even as my case load grows it won’t take a tremendous amount of time to do my billing,” predicts Cara. “The superbill is electronic and goes through to the billing system, and it is really fast and easy. In a larger organization there are so many more steps and everything takes so much longer. When you do it all yourself you can see the status or the problem right away and fix it right then. It is so much more efficient.”

She says she has talked to larger organizations about Kareo, and they can’t believe she does her own billing. “They are so shocked that I do my own billing and how easy it was for me to learn,” Cara says. “And I get paid so much faster. I get insurance payment in three weeks or less and have never had any problems with getting paid.”

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## Conclusion

Cara has gotten exactly what she wanted—the flexibility to control her schedule and provide care to patients when they need it through methods that can make her available when they most need her. “I have seen the surprise and relief on someone’s face when they were in crisis and were able to get an appointment immediately,” she says. “They were having an anxiety attack or were severely depressed, and I was there. It feels just like an in-person visit, but they don’t have to leave work or drive to an appointment, or check in and wait. There is less anxiety and stress in getting to the visit. All of my patients love it.”

Her innovative, cutting edge approach combined with decades of experience have made her one of the top five therapists in Ohio according to RankMyTherapist. And, she is doing it all on her own terms with simple solutions like Kareo that make it easy. “I see the potential, and I am going to stick with it and keep building my practice,” she says. “In the future I hope we see more people, primary care physicians, and other organizations taking advantage of the benefits of having access to a virtual counselor. The patients who try it are sold after the visit. We just have to keep spreading the word!”