Telemedicine and the Diagnosis and Treatment of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

When using telemedicine, and a patient presents with symptoms of an STI, the CDC recommendation, per the January 2020 MMWR CDC STI Guidelines is the following:

Treatment

In settings where same-day treatment is available for patients with STD-related conditions and for sex partners of patients with a diagnosed STD, treatment should not be delayed while awaiting diagnostic test results. Delays in treatment might increase complications and contribute to transmission of infection in the community; and same-day treatment has numerous public health benefits. In an STD specialty care setting, same-day treatment should take place on site with the provision of a full course of appropriate medication. The first dose should be administered while the patient is in the clinic.

We should treat someone with symptoms of an STI presumptively, while also ordering the appropriate screening tests. Treatment should not be withheld pending the laboratory results.

For a telehealth visit for a patient presenting with symptoms, or patients whose sexual history requires appropriate screening for STIs, testing should be done for all body parts that have had sexual contact; i.e. urogenital screening for GC and CT by collection of a urine specimen, vaginal swab, or extragenital contact through oral or anal sex, a swab of the pharynx and/or rectum should be done. Patients can self-swab the vagina or extragenital body parts, by getting a kit in the clinic where the lab is located. The STI screening kit will contain a screw top urine container, and two orange Aptima tubes with swabs for the extragenital swabbing, and or vaginal swabbing. In each kit will be printed instruction on how to self swab the vagina, pharynx and/or rectum. The swabs should be inserted into the tube, broken off at the marked line, and the top securely tightened on the tube. The patient should write their name and body source on each specimen container and insert the items into a bag and bring that to the lab. The order for the tests will be sent to the Quest along with other laboratory tests in the usual fashion.