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In Sickness and in Health in South Texas: Narratives of COVID's Impact

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Establishment of a Baccalaureate Nursing Telehealth Clinical Practicum

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The COVID-19 pandemic closed many of the usual community nursing clinical sites including public schools and outpatient clinics. Fortunately, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) permitted University of the Incarnate Word faculty to facilitate three-way phone calls that connected faculty, baccalaureate nursing students and enrolled clients. During initial phone calls, faculty and students educated FQHC clients about COVID related topics such as signs and symptoms to report to a health care provider; how to make an appointment for the drive-through FQHC clinic; prevention of infection through social distancing, masking, and handwashing; and management of infection at home. During follow-up phone calls, faculty and students notified FQHC clients of positive or negative testing results and signs and reinforced teaching about prevention and management. After the U.S. Congress and President approved the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act**, the University of the Incarnate Word received grant funding to establish a telehealth center on campus. This initiative was led by Dr. Linda Hook, who coordinated the equipment and technology purchases. From then on, the telehealth center expanded scope of services which currently include FQHC client medication refill assistance, high-risk obstetric follow-up, and vaccine reminders. Opportunities for the future are numerous including interprofessional learning labs and teamwork. The University of the Incarnate Word Schools of Medicine, Nursing, Athletic Training, Physical Therapy, and Pharmacy have already piloted an interprofessional telehealth simulation focused on client self-management of diabetes. All of these telehealth clinical and academic advancements occurred because of the COVID -19 pandemic, and are due to innovative clinical and academic practice partners who were able to quickly adapt to the changing health care environment.