



case study

SynerGenius Achieves Telepsychiatry Synergy Using Zoom

Living, working, and socializing in a 21st-century environment isn't easy for some. The accumulated stress can lead to symptoms that interfere with both family and career, and often result in people not achieving their true potential, which is a tragedy not only for those suffering, but for society as a whole. Fortunately, increasing awareness of mental illness and decreasing stigma around seeking help for such issues are making it easier for people to seek psychological help these days.

As a consequence, there is a high demand for psychiatrists who can meet the needs of patients who live far away or who have their own lives, schedules, or other unique issues. This demand for services, coupled with limited time and other resources, is why many psychiatrists are trying a new direction: telepsychiatry. Telepsychiatry is an innovative method of therapy that involves speaking to a patient virtually rather than meeting in the office.

It might seem surprising that psychiatry can happen virtually. To help their patients, psychiatrists must thoroughly explore their patients' lives, creating trust and rapport, often over long periods. But patients frequently suffer from a variety of challenges to their care: impaired mobility, limited transportation, remote rural environments, or even agoraphobia. Video is a powerful tool that can connect the doctor directly with the patient over great distances.

So let's meet a pioneering practitioner of telepsychiatry: Chanel Helgason, MD. Dr. Helgason runs SynerGenius, a consulting and psychiatry practice that uses the power of video to reach its clients. She also serves on the faculty of a Master's and PhD program in mind-body medicine at an accredited university.

"SynerGenius is comprised of two different sister organizations," says Dr. Helgason. "The first one is SynerGenius Telepresence, which is



SynerGenius

Industry: Healthcare

- SynerGenius is a consulting and psychiatry practice
- The organization uses Zoom for telepsychiatry
- SynerGenius and patients benefit from Zoom's ease of use and security

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– Dr. Chanel Helgason
SynerGenius owner and operator

my private practice for telepsychiatry.” SynerGenius Telepresence offers individualized integrative medicine and mind-body treatments using telepresence technology. She says, “These techniques can help people improve their wellbeing, regardless of the challenges they face.”

The second is SynerGenius Consulting, which offers wellness and life balance services for individuals and groups. “Our focus is on helping people bring balance into their lives and learn how to deal with stress,” says Dr. Helgason. The consulting focuses on reclaiming a life of health, happiness, and harmony through her Seven Foundations: Rest/Rejuvenation, Movement, Nutrition, Self, Relationships, Work, and Meaning.

SynerGenius’ entire operation depends on video meetings. For this reason, Dr. Helgason was very attentive to her choice of meeting platform for SynerGenius. She had to find a platform with little room for failure - she couldn’t have the software fail in the middle of a patient breakthrough!

“When looking for meeting software, I compiled a spreadsheet of every option I found,” she said. “I later gathered a group of five of my closest friends and tested each service to see what I could possibly use for my practice. After each trial, we would exchange feedback on the quality of the experience and depth of features.”

Much to Dr. Helgason’s dismay, at first there didn’t seem to be a single video meeting solution that “fit” SynerGenius. After trying almost a dozen applications and experiencing everything from minor disappointments to total failures, she still wasn’t ready to throw the towel just yet. She then reached Zoom’s cloud meeting platform on her list.

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Zoom was at least as good as, and frequently better than, many of the more expensive platforms on the market.”

Dr. Helgason also relates the conclusions she reached about other solutions during her hunt: “Other companies offered software that was either sub-par or didn’t exactly fit with my model. It was either too hard to join, required specialized equipment, needed an account for each participant, provided poor video or audio quality, did not provide adequate security, or was plagued by a combination of all of these problems. Walking patients through the process of joining a meeting on this kind of complicated software was just too cumbersome for my vision - a simple, straightforward system that would make care accessible to those who have been underserved by traditional psychiatry practice. I wanted a program that would be easy to use for all my patients, no matter how tech-savvy or technophobic they might be.”

Her experience with Zoom was, in fact, pleasant enough that she started using it in other parts of her work life. “At the university where I teach, I unofficially use Zoom to work with my students because the quality and features are so much better than the other services available to us,” she said. “Being able to see everyone’s face when talking to them is one of the most fantastic experiences, especially when conducting and participating in the support groups we offer at SynerGenius. The same goes for conference calls with my students. It’s very interactive when they get to see each other rather than being limited to just a couple of people, or just the professor or doctor, the way some other services are set up.” Other available software only allows a certain number of faces on the screen at once, usually 6-10. “This was a major flaw. With Zoom, it feels like we’re all in the same room.”

Aside from speaking with her group participants and students in a way that was much more immersive, Zoom also allowed her to deal with her patients more easily while maintaining a professional atmosphere. For example, any



other software she tried would require her patients to register accounts and add her as a contact in order to speak to her. To maintain a proper patient-doctor relationship, she needed her software to work without an account requirement for participants. Zoom made this process very simple by allowing patients to quickly connect to her by just clicking the link to a meeting room.

“Perhaps one of the most valuable features of Zoom is the ability to connect quickly and cleanly, without having to waste time registering for an account,” she said. “This kind of feature is very difficult to find, at least in video solutions that are inexpensive. It felt unprofessional for me to require all of my patients to sign up for an account and add me as a personal contact.”

In Dr. Helgason’s line of work, there are times when she meets with large groups of people. It’s imperative for the software to be able to properly render all of the participants’ video and audio feeds without delays, skipping, or dropouts. To her delight, Dr. Helgason was able to communicate with all her participants with the clarity, quality, and efficiency she’d expect from a high-tier platform.

“We had a meeting once with around 20 participants, and the experience was no different than what one would expect from software that costs \$100 per month to use,” she said. “Zoom makes it easier for someone like me - a solo practitioner - to communicate with patients just as effectively as a large company would.”

Another key feature is Zoom’s encryption feature. “As a healthcare provider, security and privacy were of the utmost concern in selecting a video service,” says Dr. Helgason. Fortunately, Zoom encrypts her meetings using the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) 128-bit algorithm, so her patients can relax, knowing their

private information is secure.

There’s no such thing as a perfect piece of software, and Zoom cloud meetings are no exception. Dr. Helgason relates her experience with Zoom’s customer support: “In one Zoom class meeting, we were having an audio issue. Soon after I sent over an email to the staff, someone came on mid-meeting and troubleshooted the issue with us. With the other software, if we were lucky we might catch someone who could actually address our problem after being put on hold for half an hour. Also, with many of the tech support centers, it seemed like they had trouble understanding the nature of the problem.”

Of course, the most important key in psychiatry is the personal connection that the patient feels with the therapist. Many people expect that establishing rapport will be difficult when communicating on a screen, and this is one of the reasons many people are reluctant to try using video communications at first. This potential roadblock is minimized when people like Dr. Helgason use Zoom’s cloud meeting platform to communicate with patients. “I often reassure patients that the video may feel strange for the first five minutes or so, and then we’ll both probably forget we’re not sitting next to each other. Based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback I’ve gotten from patients, I find this to be true almost every time.”

“When I’m trying to ask patients personal questions in a virtual meeting, I need an environment that’s as close to a face-to-face meeting as possible,” she said. “Zoom was one of the very few choices available to me that made a noticeable difference in the way I was able to communicate with my patients. When something goes wrong, I need a strong support system to solve any issues I may have. I can’t say enough about how helpful Zoom consistently is in this aspect. Added to this, Zoom has a very attractive price point, dramatically better than anything similar in quality. Plus, Zoom offers a level of privacy and security that allows my patients peace of mind, and lets them focus on getting well.”



To highlight Dr. Helgason's experience, this is exactly what made Zoom the perfect fit for SynerGenius:

- Zoom is easy to connect with, and doesn't require participants to have any accounts.
- Zoom's high-quality audio and video allow for more immersive meeting experiences.
- Zoom can accommodate up to 100 two-way participants, allowing large meetings to take place.
- At its price, Zoom manages to match higher-tier offers, sometimes providing even more features.
- Zoom offers high-end data security, including AES 128 bits encryption.
- Unlike other meeting software, Zoom's cloud meeting platform lets participants talk to each other fluidly, rather than requiring the host to transfer the "right" to speak to each participant individually, so it feels like an in-person conversation.

Considering Dr. Helgason's experience, Zoom has proven to be a valuable meeting venue for telepsychiatry practices. Her practice is able to run smoothly, and according to our conversation with her, the vast majority of her patients were delighted with the experience. In the future, we expect to see an upward trend in psychiatrists using products like Zoom to reach patients in ways they have never done before.



Zoom helps businesses and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless cloud environment to get more done. Our easy, reliable, video- first unified communications platform for video, voice, content sharing, and chat runs across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems. Founded in 2011, Zoom is a publicly traded company on Nasdaq (ticker: ZM) and headquartered in San Jose, California. Visit zoom.com and follow [@zoom_us](https://twitter.com/zoom_us).

