

> > > Remote consultations

Remote consultations

Remote consultations (over the phone, via video link or online) are on the increase.

They can save doctors' time, benefit patients and help meet public demand for faster access to medical advice.

But there are potential patient safety risks to consulting remotely. It's important to identify and manage those risks, and to recognise that remote consultations are not always the right choice.

Innovations in medical practice

Charlie Massey - Chief Executive and Registrar of the General Medical Council

"We welcome innovations in medical practice that enable good care for patients, and support the use of remote prescribing that follows our clear prescribing guidance used in consultation with a patient in person or online."



Is a remote consultation appropriate?

Effective consultations allow you to establish a dialogue with your patient and make an adequate assessment of their condition.

There can be obstacles to this if you're consulting by remote means. For example, if you're speaking with a patient on the telephone, you can't see their physical symptoms or demeanour. Or if you're reviewing an online questionnaire you can't ask the patient follow-up questions and the two-way dialogue is lacking.

So as a starting point, ask yourself:

- 1 What do I know about the patient's needs and wishes?**


 - 2 What are limitations and risks of communicating with the patient by phone/video link/online?**

 - 3 Will I need to carry out a physical examination or other assessment?**

 - 4 Do I have access to the patient's medical records and do I need them?**

 - 5 Will the patient need follow up or ongoing management?**
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The answers should help you decide when a remote consultation is appropriate, and when a face-to-face consultation is required.



Weigh up the factors
to decide type of consultation

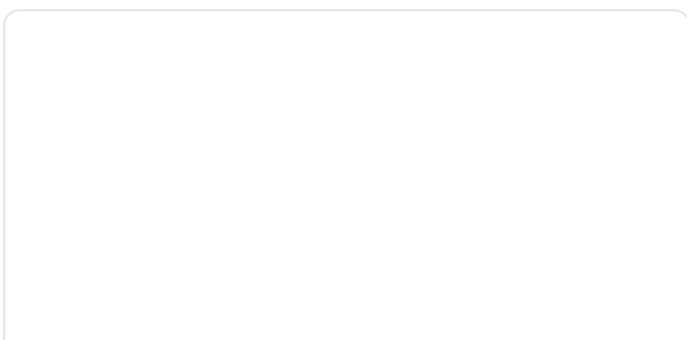
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Deciding whether to perform a remote consultation

How to weigh up the factors to decide if a remote consultation is appropriate. This is not an exhaustive list, this diagram shows some of the things you will need to consider when deciding if a remote consultation is appropriate.



You **must** carry out a physical examination before prescribing injectable cosmetic products such as Botox, Dysport or Vistabel. Do not prescribe them on the basis of a telephone, video or online consultation.

Scroll through our case study below about a doctor who works for an online pharmacy receiving a questionnaire requesting painkillers for acute back pain.



Background

Dr Best works for an online pharmacy, assessi

Case study



Good practice – key issues

The 3Cs - consent, capacity and continuity of care - are key issues to remember when you are advising or prescribing treatment for a patient via remote consultation.

CONSENT

- Give patients information about all the options available to them (including the option not to treat) in a way they can understand
- Tailor the information you give, and the way you give it, to patients' individual needs, and check that they've understood it.
- If you're not sure a patient has all the information they want and need, or that they've understood it, consider whether it is safe to provide treatment

CAPACITY

- Start from the presumption that an adult patient has capacity to make decisions for themselves.
- Be able to identify concerns about a patient's capacity to make a particular decision.
- Maximise patients' capacity to make decisions for themselves.
- If a patient lacks capacity to make a decision, consider whether remote consultation is appropriate, including whether you can meet the requirements of mental capacity law.

CONTINUITY OF CARE

- If you're not the patient's GP, ask the patient for consent to get information and a history from their GP and to send details of any treatment you've arranged
- If the patient refuses, explore their reasons and explain the potential impact of their decision on their continuing care.
- If the patient continues to refuse, consider whether it is safe to provide treatment.
- Make record of your decision and be prepared to explain and justify it if asked to do so.

Other points to remember

- 1 Follow GMC guidance - the guidance on consent and good practice in prescribing

2 Work within your competence

3 Check you have adequate indemnity cover for your remote consultation activities

4 Discuss this element of your practice with your RO at appraisal

Raising patient safety concerns

If you work with an organisation that provides remote advice and treatment services to patients, you should:

- follow our guidance
- take account of the organisation's policies and procedures that support delivery of safe, effective care.

If you're concerned that your organisation's arrangements pose a risk to patients, you have a responsibility to raise your concerns with those in a position to put the matter right.

If you're a doctor with leadership and management responsibilities in an organisation that provides remote services, you have a responsibility to ensure that patients can receive safe care and to act on any concerns brought to your attention.

Related guidance

Consent: patients and doctors making decisions together

Good medical practice

**Good practice in
prescribing and managing
medicines and devices**

**Raising and acting on
concerns**