

COVID-19 Update to Members

01 May 2020

GPIT advice on Video Consultation and Teleconferencing for COVID-19 Pandemic

What GPs need to successfully teleconference or video consult

Video consulting or teleconferencing requires software and hardware for both the GP and patient with the ability to capture sound, video and playback to each party. It is dependent on a good internet connection between both parties, along with good quality cameras and microphones. Thankfully, most smartphones have microphones and cameras which fulfil the latter requirement.

For the process to work, both you and the patient must ensure you are both clearly visible with light from the front (ideally daylight) to optimise assessment of the patients. Get the patient to open curtains and turn on lights. Close doors and windows to minimise background noise which could interfere.

Avoid simultaneous streaming on the network as that uses up your broadband width (e.g. someone else in the home watching Netflix while you are teleconferencing). If using your phone, ensure the patient hears your communication and get them to periodically read back advice you have given.

If you plan to teleconference from your PC, then quality can be significantly improved by investing in a good web camera where the quality will be much better than the computer camera.

Also, consider buying the type of headset the kids use on the PS4/Xbox - they have excellent microphones and comfortable speakers which allows you to hear the patients better.

Software to assess the patient for triage

The software suggested below have not all been individually tested or endorsed by GPIT. We are listing a range of options from free apps for phones to payware. The latter will be much more secure, incorporating encryption technology, can offer appointments and have note-taking abilities. There are many other software choices out there every bit as good, but it is worth noting that the sound and image quality is not dependent on what software is used and more dependent on hardware and internet speeds.

Freeware:

With regards to freeware apps, there are obvious security concerns regarding ownership of the video, and many would not be compliant with GDPR.

Nonetheless practically and right now in these extraordinary times when our priority must be to avoid exposure and disease dissemination, for some GPs these will offer the most simple and most accessible mode of video consultation.

Freeware apps are available on your phones, which ones will depend on your particular device. If not already installed they are easily downloaded from your app store and include:

- Face time - the free video app with apple phones would require the patient also to have an iPhone.
- WhatsApp Video call - open by clicking the little camera icon at the top.
- Facebook Messenger

Freeware Apps to download on your Phone or on your PC

- Skype <https://www.skype.com>
- Google Meet <https://meet.google.com/>
- Zoom <https://zoom.us>
- Microsoft Teams
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-ie/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

Payware:

Payware software options may incorporate improved functions eg. offer appointment scheduling, billing and note-taking.

The HSE have worked with two Irish software companies to offer two video consultation services specifically for Irish health care professionals during the pandemic. They are

- NuaHealth €24/month <https://www.nuahealth.com/>
- Eirecare €19+VAT/month <https://www.eirecare.com/>

Another Irish company has offered video consultations free to GPs for the duration of the pandemic

- Myclinic365 <https://myclinic365.com/>

Other commercially available payware available includes

- GoTo meeting €14.33/month <https://www.gotomeeting.com>
- Zoom Pro €13.99/month <https://zoom.us>

What to do if the patient has no internet access or technical difficulties

There are areas around the country where there is no broadband or 3G internet access. It is just not possible to conduct video consultations in these situations. For Covid assessments, remember that the patient can still be assessed for respiratory distress by taking a history on the phone and observing respiratory rate and signs of distress.

If an elderly or unwell patient has difficulty using video consultation software, consider asking a next of kin to video the patient on their smartphone (from a safe 2 metre distance obviously) or they could send a photograph or video clip by email.

For patients with respiratory symptoms, the video from the phone could then be viewed by us to help gauge the patient's severity of illness and need for review in a Covid Hub or hospital assessment. Not ideal but these are not ideal times.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE TO WORK REMOTELY FROM YOUR PRACTICE

Circumstances may arise during the Covid-19 pandemic when it is the GP rather than the patient who cannot attend the surgery. At this time, it is important to consider what is required to work remotely. If connected securely and remotely to your practice network, it is possible to work from a home computer as if you were in the surgery. You would be able to enter notes from teleconsultations, refer via Healthlink and send prescriptions by Healthmail, as well as accessing other files on your practice computer.

The ideal solution is to contact your Practice management software provider practice computer technician to set up a virtual private network (VPN) to keep the connection to your patient records secure, however this may not be possible if your situation changes suddenly. A more pragmatic choice may be remote access software which takes control of a specific computer in your surgery (this computer may not be used for anything else while you access it remotely)

Remote access software.

There are a number of softwares which can be used for remote and are easy to install by computer download. Payware is recommended as it will usually provide encryption, better security and better functionality. Examples would be:

- Logmein <http://www.logmein.com>
- Splashtop <http://www.splashtop.com>
- TeamViewer www.teamviewer.com
- AnyDesk www.anydesk.com

Prices for payware start at approx. €100 p.a. depending on software and features.

If working remotely, you should consider:

- Do you wish to consult via your own phone, practice mobile or video consulting software?
- What arrangements to have for liaison and handover to colleagues or staff in the surgery?
- How you organize and manage your working day