Virtual Health

Telephone Visits for Virtual Care

Purpose
Clinicians regularly utilize the telephone to provide patient care. Becoming aware of a few best practices can help clinicians improve the effectiveness of these virtual visits.

Best Use
A telephone visit is most suitable for established clinical relationships when an in-person visit is not required, video is not needed, and a verbal discussion can meet the patient’s needs. Telephone care is a well-recognized approach to support patient consultation, assessment, diagnosis and treatment, follow-up including test results, education and counselling1, where appropriate.

Consultations between clinicians, including multidisciplinary case conferences (where the patient and/or family may or may not be involved), are also easily supported using the telephone.

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<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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<td>• Most people have access to a telephone and it is simple to use.</td>
<td>• Participants cannot see each other, limiting the type of information that can be obtained.</td>
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<td>• A phone call can support many aspects of care delivery, throughout the spectrum of care.</td>
<td>• Cellular fees or long-distance charges may be incurred.</td>
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<td>• Offers an alternative to a video visit if the patient prefers using the telephone to access care.</td>
<td>• Patients may not have a telephone landline or may have unreliable cellular service.</td>
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<td>• There may be privacy considerations (e.g., if cell phone calls are routed outside Canada).</td>
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Best Practices

Before the Call
- Obtain the patient’s verbal permission to participate in the virtual telephone visit.
- Confirm the patient’s preferred telephone number for the visit.
- Schedule and register patients for all telephone visits within existing department scheduling systems.
- Use an Alberta Health Services cell phone, landline or Skype for Business to call the patient. If using your personal phone, ensure the call display function is turned off.
- If the patient is unavailable, leave a concise message requesting they return your call.

During the Call
- Include Interpretation & Translation services to support communication, if required.
- Introduce yourself using Name, Occupation and Duty (NOD) and the reason for calling.
- Verify the patient’s identity with two identifiers (AHS Patient Identification Policy #PS-06).
- Confirm that the patient wishes to proceed with the virtual telephone visit.
- Ensure they are available to talk, are in a private space where their health information will not be overheard, and confirm whether anyone else is joining the call.
- Obtain the address of their current location, in the event of a medical emergency.
- Complete the patient consult, assessment or treatment and provide next steps.

After the Call
- Complete documentation in the patient’s record of care.

1 The information in this document has been modified from the Provincial Health Services Authority of British Columbia’s website http://www.phsa.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/office-of-virtual-health/covid-19-virtual-health-toolkit/telephone-consults