

Technology-based patient consultations

2013

Technology-based patient consultations are increasingly being used by all medical specialties.

Technology-based patient consultations are defined by the Medical Board of Australia as:

patient consultations that use any form of technology, including, but not restricted to videoconferencing, internet and telephone, as an alternative to face-to-face consultations.

Technology-based patient consultations are an appropriate alternative to consulting with a patient in the same physical room when they are used:

- as an adjunct to normal medical practice;
- for regular patients of the practice;
- for patients who have been referred by another medical practitioner;
- when it is clinically appropriate for the patient's circumstances.

Used in this way, technology-based patient consultations can improve patient access to care and can enhance efficiency in medical practice. They complement but do not replace face-to-face consultations, which enable a physical examination of the patient as part of the therapeutic process. Technology-based patient consultations should not be used in a way that fragments the ongoing care and management of the patient.

When providing a technology-based patient consultation, a medical practitioner should be confident that:

- the consultation occurs in a private and secure environment to protect patient privacy;
- the patient is properly identified before commencing the consultation;
- the patient understands and agrees the arrangements for technology-based consultations;
- the practitioner reviews the patient's file and makes a clinical record as they would do in a face-to-face consultation; and
- the patient is informed about costs and billing arrangements for technology-based consultations.

As with face-to-face consultations, medical fees for technology-based patient consultations should include the indirect costs of providing the service such as:

- the scheduling of appointments (for the practitioner and the patient to be available at the same pre-determined time);
- secure IT infrastructure, and telephone and/or data lines;
- electronic billing arrangements; and
- arranging follow up services for the patient.

As a medical service, it is appropriate that Medicare Benefits arrangements assist patients with the costs of medical care provided using technology-based patient consultations.

Reproduction and distribution of AMA position statements is permitted provided the AMA is acknowledged and that the position statement is faithfully reproduced noting the year at the top of the document.