

Video Appointments

Virtual health involves providing clinical health services, education and care to patients remotely using emerging and new digital and telecommunication technologies. The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (the College) supports the use of telehealth and technology-based services where it assists GPs and rural hospital doctors to provide safe, quality health care, improve health equity and increase service efficiency.

A video appointment is where the doctor and patient use information and video conferencing technologies to communicate with each other. Visual and audio information are exchanged in real time but the doctor and patient are not physically present in the same consultation room (The New Zealand Medical Council).

The goals of offering video appointments are to: offer convenient care to patients; drive efficiencies and sustainability in business models; support the ongoing relationship between the patient and the general practice team and to allow flexibility in the working environment (i.e. practitioner doesn't always have to be based at the practice to deliver a consultation).

Q: WHEN SHOULD VIDEO APPOINTMENTS BE USED?

The college considers that telehealth and technology-based patient consultations are an appropriate when used:

- To complement in-person consultations not replace them
- For regular patients of the practice supporting the ongoing relationship between the patient and the general practice team
- When it is clinically appropriate

Q: WHAT COULD BE APPROPRIATE TO DO AS A VIDEO APPOINTMENT?

- When patient doesn't require physical examination
- Travel medicine conversations or advice when traveling

- Discussions about management of acne
- Contraception (youth friendly) options/ concerns/ repeat script
- Wound checks e.g. when following up a small local lesion
- Repeat prescriptions
- Long term mental health reviews
- Long term condition review
- Work and Income benefit reviews
- Patients with physical access issues (location)
- Advice/ certificate for off-work e.g. patient has a UTI

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO PRACTICES AND PATIENTS?

- More timely communication between GP and patient, and between GPs and other health practitioners
- Meets patient needs around individualised and convenient access to healthcare - evidence shows around 70% of the time taken to see a primary care doctor is travel and waiting room time
- Enables GPs to monitor disease progression and propose timely interventions
- Facilitates patient ownership of their condition and its management
- Helps to safeguard life-long patient-clinician relationships
- Allows remotely located patients easier access to care
- Allows GPs to observe and interact with their patients in their own homes
- For those patients in distress or with high anxiety, the challenges around coming into the clinic and waiting in the waiting room are removed
- GP's report that consultations take less time allowing all consultation notes to be completed within the 15 minute appointment time
- Build new skills and capabilities and move us towards future models of primary care
- Possibilities for flexible afterhours access and flexibility in working environments for practice staff