

VIRTUAL CARE BEST PRACTICES

Privacy:

- **Ensure that the videoconferencing platform is privacy and security compliant** based on federal and provincial privacy regulations (PIPEDA, PHIPA, etc.);
- If the pharmacy is using a platform that is not secure, **the benefits of using the platform must** be weighed against the risks to privacy and confidentiality. **Information transmitted using unregulated platforms** should also be kept to a minimum, and **not include any unnecessary patient information.** Texting and unencrypted emails must not be used to **transmit personally identifying health information;**
- Pharmacy staff using the platform must **familiarize themselves with the security features and limitations of any virtual care technology used** and must continually **ensure that the understanding and knowledge of these platforms are current and up to date;**
- The pharmacy manager should conduct **privacy impact assessment** following provincial privacy regulations and **notify the provincial Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC), if required;**
- **The patient can help protect their privacy by using a private computer/device (i.e., not an employer's or third party's computer/device), a secure account, and a secure internet connection (i.e., no free internet at coffee shop);**
- **Pharmacists should not record virtual care encounters unless they have the informed consent of the patient and can ensure the information is kept secure from access by third parties.**

Technology:

- **Adequate and maintained technology (computers/tablets) free of viruses or malware;**
- **Ensure fast and reliable internet connection (if you can watch a video on YouTube without interruption, the connection should be sufficient):**
 - It should be confirmed with the patient whether the **patient has access to fast and reliable internet connection.**
- **Ensure a good quality webcam and microphone:**
 - Use of peripheral devices (**external webcams and microphone/speaker set**) can substantially improve the quality of a video **consultation;**
 - It is recommended to use a **USB webcam with high definition (1080p) resolution and autofocus;**
 - If you are using a USB webcam, **position it close to the middle of the screen** either at the top or bottom of the screen. This helps to create a **perception of eye-contact.** If you are using a tablet computer, **place the device on a stand to eliminate camera movement;**
 - **Fill your webcam's view with your head and shoulders.** If you can't control the zoom on your webcam you may need to **sit closer to the webcam;**
 - If there are **multiple participants in the video conference,** they need to **sit side-by-side.** They may need to **sit further back from the webcam to get in view;**
 - For optimal audio quality, use a headset with an integrated microphone. The headset from your mobile phone is **suitable;**
 - If you need to **type during your video conference** you will need to **use a headset to avoid transmitting keyboard noise;**
 - The next best option is to use an external speaker and microphone. Many webcams have a built-in speaker microphone which are good to use. Alternatively, you can use a **USB microphone speaker;**

- If you are using an external microphone, position it close (< 1m) to all participants, but not too close to sources of noise such as paper rustling, air conditioners, ceiling fans, keyboards which can be distracting as the sound is amplified by your microphone;
- Speak at a normal volume. There is no need to raise your voice when the microphone is properly configured;
- It should be confirmed with the patient whether this is available on their side.
- Two screens/computers may be preferred (one for interacting with patients, and another for accessing patient records). You can print the patient's profile, but if there is need for additional information or research on the patient's file or drug references, you will no longer have direct interaction;
- Meeting Platform functionalities:
 - Ensure the meeting platform provides different meeting rooms to prevent accidentally allowing other patients to join the meeting;
 - E-signature capability in the meeting platform for any written consents for required documentations may be preferred;
 - Screen sharing capabilities to review documentations with the patient may be preferred;
 - Allow a payment platform, if available;
 - Ensure platforms are secure.
- Recommended platforms:
 - Reacts;
 - Microsoft Teams;
 - WebEx.

Physical Environment:

- Use a room that is well-lit, either by natural light or ceiling lights;
- Sit in front of a plain backdrop such as a wall. Avoid sitting in front of busy backgrounds, as these can be distracting or cause camera artifacts;
- Avoid sitting directly underneath ceiling lights, as this can create unflattering shadows beneath the eyes and nose;
- Avoid ceiling fans as they can cast a moving shadow;
- Avoid sitting in front of an unshielded window or glass door as this creates a silhouette and facial expressions cannot be seen;
- Avoid uncarpeted rooms as they can have poor acoustics that can cause echoes (which may not be apparent to you but can be very noticeable to other participants).

Setting-up the Virtual Consultation:

- Pharmacy staff should explain to the patient that virtual care limits the ability of the pharmacist to conduct a physical examination. This may prevent pharmacists from conducting an optimal assessment, and, as a result, they may not be able or willing to perform certain patient care activities such as prescribing;
- Pharmacy staff should obtain two informed consents—one for receiving virtual care and one for the collection, use, disclosure, and storage of health information through the technology used to provide virtual care. In some provinces, consents must be documented in the patient record.

Patient Interaction:

TIPS: Speak slightly slower than you would in normal conversation. Take care not to talk over the top of other participants. Pause after speaking and be conscious of taking turns. Avoid excessive movement which can interfere with consistent audio volume. Inform your patient if you need to look away from the screen (e.g. to look up information).

- Introduce yourself:
 - Provide your name, title (Pharmacist).
- Ask if the patient can hear and see you;
- If the patient is new to the pharmacy, or if a pre-existing patient relationship does not exist, independently verify patient's identity:
 - Ask the patient to self-identify their name and other piece of person information (DOB, address, etc.).
- Inform the patient to call you if there are any technical difficulties during the consultation. Confirm that the phone number both parties have is correct;
- Verify that patient is in a private environment that is free of disruptions:
 - If the patient has other participants joining the meeting, ask that all participants are captured in the video;
 - If there is anyone else in the room, ask the patient that they must move into the camera view, or leave the room.
- Prepare the patient before beginning the consultation to ensure a good interaction will ensue. If necessary, ask them to adjust their camera, re-position themselves or the person accompanying them, turn on the light, or close curtains behind them:
 - The pharmacist must ensure that they have explained the risks of using the technology and have obtained informed consent.
- Consent must be received and documented by the attending pharmacist at every virtual patient encounter. An example might include the following: "<Name of pharmacist> provided <patient name> with information concerning the risks and benefits of providing virtual care through <platform name>. Before giving consent, the patient confirmed that he understood:
 - the risks and benefits associated with the provision of care through <virtual technology>;
 - the risks to the confidentiality of the patient's personal information and personal health information associated with the use of <virtual technology>, including the risk of unauthorized disclosure or interception of personal health information;
 - the steps the patient should take to help protect their confidential information, including health information in using electronic technology.
- Verify the purpose of the virtual meeting (i.e. medication review, counselling, device training, etc.)
- Establish and maintain a professional relationship with the patient for virtual care:
 - Establishing a professional relationship means the pharmacist must speak directly with the patient, their agent, or their caregiver to identify the health priorities of the individual, determine what the patient understands about their medication and their condition, and gather information about their health history and current medication use.
- When pharmacists assess a patient using virtual care, they must use their professional judgement to determine if there is enough information available to them to make a sufficiently informed decision. If it is determined that a patient requires a physical assessment, or otherwise cannot be adequately and safely assessed using virtual means, other options must be considered. When assessing using virtual care, pharmacists must:

- **Consider the limitations of the technology or method of communication used and evaluate the clinical activity being conducted to ensure the pharmacist can reasonably:**
 - **access any information required to make a clinical assessment;**
 - **complete a thorough clinical assessment of the patient;**
 - **identify and take appropriate action for any drug therapy problems;**
 - **conduct follow up on the care they have provided;**
 - **ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the patient are maintained**
- **Reflect on whether they have the knowledge and information necessary to treat the patient's condition. If not, they must determine whether to consult with, collaborate with, or refer the patient to another member of the patient's health team or an alternative**

Other Considerations:

- **The pharmacy should develop appropriate policies and procedures that specify:**
 - **Which technologies and equipment will be used;**
 - **How to maintain and ensure privacy and security training;**
 - **A contingency plan for interruptions in data transmission and for confidentiality breaches**
- **Pharmacists must always use their professional judgement as to whether it is appropriate and in the best interest of the patient to interact remotely;**
- **When prescribing remotely, pharmacists must meet their Standards of Practice and provide a level of care commensurate with the care they would provide if they saw the patient personally, keeping in mind limitations of virtual care when it comes to physical assessments of the patient;**
- **Above all else, the pharmacist must:**
 - **consider the well-being of the patient;**
 - **take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to patients;**
 - **determine what the patient understands about their medication and their condition;**
 - **gather information about their health history and current medication use.**

References :

<https://pharmacy5in5.ca/app/#/module/56>

<https://abpharmacy.ca/covid-19-guidance-providing-virtual-care-patients>

<https://coh.centre.uq.edu.au/quick-guides-telehealth>

<https://telesante.quebec/>