



Stay informed #COVID19

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Dear Doctor

Virtual consultations to support doctors and patients

In line with best practice guidance on social distancing to manage suspected cases of COVID-19, we have informed members to use virtual consultations as an appropriate alternative, when they think they may have symptoms. We encourage you to make use of DrConnect on HealthID to manage any patients that reach out to you using video call consultations to ensure the safety of your practice and healthcare professionals.

To support the increased need for virtual consultations during this time, we have enhanced the Discovery DrConnect platform by adding a dedicated group of doctors in a COVID-19 Care Team. The DrConnect functionality will allow for any member to book a virtual consultation with a doctor for COVID-19 cases, thereby supporting all healthcare professionals by managing over-crowding of consultation rooms and ensuring appropriate referral for care to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Following President Ramaphosa's address to the nation on the escalation of measures to combat COVID-19, the use of telemedicine has been widely advocated to be the preferred method for delivering healthcare during this pandemic. This is consistent with global best practice and is being advocated by doctor bodies in South Africa to protect our doctors and their patients. Although we are expecting this change very soon, the HPSCA's published guidelines around telemedicine have not yet been updated to reflect the current situation.

How to get started for virtual consultations

To consult virtually, please ensure that you:

- Are registered on HealthID DrConnect
- Set up your availability in your virtual calendar so that your patients know when they can contact you and book an appointment.
- Look out for requests for consultations from your patients or questions in your inbox.

You will be able to conduct virtual consultations via real-time video, voice or text with patients or participate in an inbox consultation where a patient will send a message to your DrConnect inbox, allowing you to reply when you're available. Remember to answer your inbox consultations within 24 hours or the consult will be expired.

Find out more or attend a dedicated webinar to help you get started

Visit the DrConnect page on our website for more information. [Click on Technical support for user guides, videos and answers to frequently asked questions](#). These guides include:

- How to manage your availability for virtual consultations
- How to bill for virtual consultations and the payment rates that apply.

If you would like additional support from our technical experts, you can also register to attend a webinar to help you get started:

- Wednesday, March 25th - 7.30 am
- Friday, March 27th - 7.30 am

Take note of the following when conducting virtual consultations

Managing consent

With the new DrConnect enhancements, you may consult with patients that you have not seen previously. This means that you may not have access to the patient's electronic health record on HealthID, and you may be limited to the medical information that they have captured on DrConnect prior to the consultation.

Prescriptions

Currently, South African law requires a prescription with your signature on it and you will therefore not be able to prescribe via DrConnect. You will have to email, fax or send a photo of your prescription to the patient. This adds no risk to existing arrangements about electronic scripting.

Referring for additional tests

Complete the pathology request form and email, fax or send a photo of the form to the patient.

Claiming for virtual consultations

In order to claim for a virtual consultation, you will have to complete a SOAP note and then submit a claim using either of the following consultation codes:

- VCONS - video call consultations
- VCONM – text or inbox consultations

Virtual consultations will be covered from the member's day-to-day benefits, according to the rules of their health plan. If the member does not have a plan that offers day-to-day benefits, you will have to invoice the member directly. Please note that all network rules for plans apply for virtual consultations, for example for KeyCare members you need to be the member's allocated Primary or Secondary GP for their allocated claim to be funded.

Updated clinical management of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease

Please refer to the recently updated document from the NICD and National Department of Health outlining the [clinical management of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease](#) (version 2).

What's new in Version 2:

- Based on global experience, the vast majority of patients will be managed at home. The guideline draws attention to the triage and management of symptomatic patients as set out in Table 2 (Section 4.1) - Criteria for management at home (for age >12 years)
- New guidance on treatment options for hospitalized cases (section 4.3)
- Statement on the use of ACE-inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (section 4.3)
- New de-isolation criteria for confirmed cases (section 4.5).

Additional supply of medicine (ESM requests)

We are aware of requests for additional supplies of medicine during the COVID-19 national state of disaster in our country. We are assured through stakeholder engagement that a sufficient supply of chronic and essential medicine will remain available to your patients. Pharmacies will remain open and accessible during this time. We appeal for calm and your support in avoiding medicine stock-piling, consistent with national public guidance, to ensure that all South Africans continue to have monthly access to their medicine as required. Please ask your patients to discuss medicine delivery options with their current pharmacy service provider should this be required.

Discovery COVID-19 Information Hub

Encourage your patients to visit our [Information Hub](#) to help them stay informed with the most up-to-date information and guidance.

On the [Healthcare Professional section](#) of our hub, we share useful clinical guidance and resources for you, including customisable emails for you to send to your patients to encourage them to consult with you virtually during this outbreak – find out more [here](#).

Look out for regular updates from us in your inbox or follow our social media handles for the latest information.



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