

## Guidelines for dentists and other healthcare workers for conducting teleconsultations effectively.

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### Abstract

**Objective:** To establish guidelines for effective patient doctor communication while using online video calling (teleconsultations).

**Design:** Based on empirical observations.

**Setting:** Can be utilized for single doctor or multi chair or multi doctor clinic or hospital setup.

**Conclusion:** Effective patient doctor communication can be achieved even in online mode with use of modern-day telecommunication gadgets and platforms. This ensures dissemination of correct technical/medical knowledge and leads to democratization of healthcare.

**Keyword:** Dentistry, mobile internet, mobile telephony, teleconsultation.

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### Introduction

With the advent of high-speed internet and mobile telephony it has become very easy for the general public to do video consults with health care providers. While it may have limited usability during an emergency and procedure is possible only when the technology is available. Due to the novel nature of the process people are not conversant in the best ways of getting a video consult done. The following article clarifies this and provides guidelines for a successful video consult.

### Discussion

Telemedicine is a new and actively developing branch of medicine. During the COVID-19 pandemic the importance of teleconsultations was realized by many medical and dental consultants.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Coupled with rising use of high speed internet<sup>[3]</sup> and access to high speed internet enabled mobile devices<sup>[4]</sup> and mobile

payment platforms<sup>[5]</sup> India also saw a sharp rise in teleconsultations. Some advantages of teleconsultations are:

1. Reduced anxiety/stress of visiting a clinic.
2. Convenience of getting expert consult at one's home.
3. Get an idea of the condition, tentative treatment plan and tentative costs involved.
4. Get acquainted with the doctor thus building trust.
5. Access to your preferred doctor from anywhere in the world.
6. Ability to prioritize treatment by knowing about the severity.
7. Saves time as one may directly approach the specialist for the required procedure.

While these advantages exist, many in the public are not conversant with the best practices of a successful tele consult. Mentioned below are the guidelines which aim

to make the process convenient and efficient and are an attempt at standardization.

## Instructions for the Consultant

### *Location and positioning*

Consultant should preferably be in his office/clinic while doing consultation. It is desirable to have a plain uncluttered background so that the patient can see and follow any instructions which the consultant gives.

Mask should preferably not be worn to allow for face to be seen and make it easier for patient to understand instructions given. The consultant may be seated on the operator chair or in regular chair while ensuring there is minimal visual noise in the background.

### *Time*

This assumes importance if the patient and consultant are in same or different time zones. In case they are in same time zone a pre-decided time can be utilized for the consult. In case they are in different time zones it is advised that consultant should select the time when they are in the office. The patient may need to adjust their schedule accordingly. This is so, because in non-emergency cases when the consultant is in their office, they can use various tools/props/model which are generally available in the clinic to show the patient. The patient can also benefit by having an overview of the operatory so that anxiety is reduced during physical visit.

### *Attire*

There are only two types of attires which are recommended to be worn by the consultant:

- a) Formal clothing with doctor's apron
- b) Clinical scrubs

Suffice it to say, attire should be clean and scrubs should not be soiled with blood or any

chemicals. Preferably a fresh set should be kept separately for online consults.

### *Device management*

Following instructions help to conduct a smooth and successful online video consult:

1. Preferably keep the mobile device on a stand so that both your hands are free. It helps in better communication and allows patient to see what the consultant intends
2. It is recommended to use a ring-flash attached to the mobile phone to have a better visual. However, this is not strictly necessary and a well illuminated room can suffice.
3. While using a platform like Google Meet or Zoom, it is recommended to use a laptop/desktop computer, as these allow for screen sharing and the patient can be simultaneously shown videos/animation etc.
4. As a corollary to above, if discussing OPG or other radio graphs Zoom and Google Meet is preferred. However, if only WhatsApp is available take the following steps:
  - a) Open the OPG etc. on your computer screen.
  - b) Keep the mobile phone on the device stand in landscape (horizontal) position.
  - c) Activate the reverse camera functionality.
  - d) Activate the own screen functionality (Enlarging your own screen by tapping on the small inset screen). This ensures that what you see is what the patient sees thus reducing confusion and miscommunication.
  - e) Adjust the phone/stand position to ensure maximum area is visible.
  - f) You may now use a pointer device (pen/pencil) or screen cursor to explain the orthopantomagram (OPG) to the patient. It also allows you to zoom into the OPG.

### **Platform**

There are various platforms which are available for video calling. These may include free to use or paid software which are customized for medical use. However, the few most often used platforms are WhatsApp, Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Facetime.

Out of these the most commonly used in India are WhatsApp and Google Meet as they are available with most of the people who use mobile devices. Use of platform is consultant and patient dependent and I do not endorse one over the other. For the sake of simplicity, we shall refer to only WhatsApp in this article. Other platform can be used in similar ways with minor modification.

### **Fees**

I recommend that the fee to be charged for video consult should be 15 to 20% lesser than regular on chair consult. However, this is a decision which each consultant can take according to the dynamics of their practice.

### **Instructions for the Patient**

#### **Location and positioning**

The patient should be seated in a position where natural /artificial light shines on their face.

#### **Device management**

In case the patient is alone and has no other help, not many changes are required in device positioning or usage. However, if there is some other person available to assist, following steps will help the consultant visualize the problem areas in a better way:

- a) Ensure a flashlight is at hand to illuminate the intra-oral (inside the mouth) region.

- b) In order to retract (push away) the cheeks, one can use the straight end of a spoon.
- c) Keep the mobile phone in landscape (horizontal) position to capture maximum area.
- d) Activate the reverse camera functionality (In WhatsApp it can be done by tapping on the extreme left button that is seen during the call).
- e) Activate the own screen functionality (Enlarging your own screen by tapping on the small inset screen). This ensures that what you see is what the consultant sees thus reducing confusion and miscommunication.
- f) Begin from the view of full face and move towards intraoral region when the consultant suggests.

### **Conclusion**

The above mentioned guidelines based on empirical evidence and fundamentals of sound clinical practice will help current and future practitioners to perform tele consults professionally while allowing for maximum utilization of the available digital platform and gadgets.

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