



Providing safe and effective treatment: selecting the appropriate mode of consultation when assessing a person's needs

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Introduction

The purpose of a consultation is twofold; it is to make sure that the pharmacy professional/prescriber has enough information about the patient to provide safe and effective treatment that meets the needs of the patient. This includes making sure that the treatment offered is compatible with any other treatment the patient is receiving and, when prescribing medicines, whether there is access to the patient's medical records to verify relevant information. It also allows the pharmacy professional to provide counselling or advice to the patient about the treatment, including what steps to take if symptoms worsen or don't improve. For the patient, it is for them to get the information they need or want, for example, about their condition; how to take any medication safely and effectively; and any necessary warnings.

The principles outlined below apply to consultations undertaken in all pharmacy settings, including those undertaken by online pharmacy services providers.

For information on what we expect pharmacy owners to consider when providing pharmacy services at a distance so that they can provide services safely and effectively and meet our standards, please see our **[Guidance for registered pharmacies providing pharmacy services at a distance, including on the internet.](#)**

The purpose of this guidance note is to set out what the pharmacy professional or prescriber, in agreement with the patient, needs to consider when selecting the mode of consultation best suited to gaining the information needed to deliver safe and effective pharmacy care. This guidance note does not cover the wide range of issues pharmacy professionals/prescribers need to consider when carrying out consultations and advising on treatment – it focuses narrowly on the points to consider when deciding what mode of consultation is safe and appropriate to use.

In addition to following this guidance, pharmacy professionals should also take into account any relevant NHS guidance produced in their country (see the additional information section, below).

For more information on prescribing see our guidance document **[In practice: Guidance for pharmacist prescribers.](#)**

Choosing the mode of consultation

There are various modes of consultation, including:

- face-to-face
- video-link, video-chat, or other online platforms
- telephone
- online questionnaires

The patient may indicate a preference for a mode of consultation and, where possible, the pharmacy professional and patient should agree which mode is most suitable. However, the pharmacy professional should make sure that the mode of consultation selected will allow them to address any specific requirements, or concerns they may have, for example:

- if the patient has a potentially serious, high-risk condition where there is a need for a physical examination or other assessments
- if there was a need for a diagnostic test before prescribing a medication
- whether a two-way dialogue can be established if needed, that is, whether the mode meets the patient's communication needs, and gives the pharmacy professional and the patient the opportunity to ask questions to get the information they both need. For instance, a system where prescriptions are issued remotely based on a questionnaire and there is no mechanism for two-way dialogue with patients is unlikely to meet these principles
- whether the mode allows the pharmacy professional to make an adequate assessment of the patient's needs
- whether the pharmacy professional can provide advice or counselling to the patient if needed, as well as signposting if required
- whether consent can be obtained. For more information on consent please see our guidance document: **[In practice: Guidance on consent](#)**
- where the pharmacy professional is uncertain about the patient's capacity to decide about treatment. The mode of consultation chosen should allow the pharmacy professional to get the information they need to make an informed decision on the patient's capacity; this is particularly important when prescribing a high-risk medicine or one linked to mental health for example
- whether the mode of consultation will maintain the patient's confidentiality and privacy. For more information on confidentiality please see our guidance document: **[In practice: Guidance on confidentiality](#)**
- the prescriber is not the patient's usual prescriber and they have not been given consent to share information with the usual prescriber/GP. Before deciding whether it is safe and appropriate to prescribe, the professional needs to gain as much information as possible from the patient; this should determine the mode of consultation used. An appropriate mode of consultation will help the prescriber to decide whether it is safe to prescribe
- Selecting the appropriate mode of consultation is particularly important when dealing with the following:

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- when treatment may need follow-up or ongoing monitoring and the prescriber needs to verify with the patient how this will be done
- where medicines which need additional safeguards are being prescribed
- the patient would be at risk of death or serious harm if they are also obtaining medicines from another source

Important note: The prescription and administration of non-surgical cosmetic products, such as Botox, Dysport, Vistabel or other injectable cosmetic medicines must only take place after a physical examination has been carried out.

If a pharmacy professional does not think they can meet our standards or follow our guidance when using a particular mode of consultation, they should offer an appropriate alternative if possible, or signpost to other services.

The information set out above, aligns with the General Medical Council's (GMC) guidance on ensuring the mode of consultation meets the individual needs of the patient and supports safe prescribing. For more detailed information and guidance from the GMC and other sources please see the 'Additional information' section below.

Additional information

- GMC, **Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices** (updated 5 April 2021), this contains guidance to help doctors decide if it is safe to prescribe. This includes issues such as the suitability of the mode of consultation, whether doctors have access to and can share relevant information about the patient and establishing two-way dialogue.
- GMC, **ethical hub**, which contains useful information on remote consultations
- GMC, a **diagram** to help doctors decide whether a face-to-face or remote consultation is most appropriate
- GMC, advice on **conducting remote consultations** in the Coronavirus FAQ section of their website Information Commissioner's Office: **Health, social care organisations and coronavirus - what you need to know**
- Guidance from UK health departments on keeping health records:
England, **The Records Management Code of Practice for Health and Social Care** (information Governance Alliance, 2022)
- Information on **remote consultations in Northern Ireland**
- **Medical defence organisations UK – for medico-legal advice**
- **NHS England – Key principles for intimate clinical assessments undertaken remotely in response to COVID-19**
- **NHS England – Standard Operating Procedures in primary care during COVID-19**
- **NHS England – Remote and Video Consultations: Guidance for Community Pharmacy Teams**
- Northern Ireland **Good Management, Good Records** (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2011).

- PSNC, Virtual conferencing and remote consultations
- RCGP: Principles of safe video consulting in general practice during COVID-19
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Guidance on remote consultations (registration needed)
- Royal Pharmaceutical Society Scotland and Community Pharmacy Scotland, Use of Near Me video consulting in pharmacy within Scotland
- Scotland Records Management: NHS Code of Practice (Scottish Government, 2012)
- Standards for online providers of sexual and reproductive health services
- Technology Enabled Care in Scotland – Implementing 'Near Me' during COVID-19
- Wales Welsh Health Circular (2000) 71: For The Record (The National Assembly for Wales, 2000)
- University of Oxford, Video consultations: information for GPs
- Valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme: temporary advice for management during coronavirus from MHRA