

## **Podiatry Association (Singapore) Telehealth Recommendations for Podiatrists 2020**

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Podiatry Association (Singapore) has formulated the Telehealth Recommendations for podiatrists in Singapore to adopt 'information and communications technology' (ICT) and provide remote consultation services to patients who require Podiatry services where a traditional face-to-face (F2F) consultation is not practically feasible (eg. mobility or movement restriction) or to fill gaps such as insufficient manpower on-site.

### **What is Telehealth**

The National Telemedicine Guidelines 2015 has defined "Telemedicine" as a systematic provision of healthcare services over physically separate environments via information and communications technology, and has broadly identified 4 domains:

Tele-Collaboration	Refers to interactions between (facility-based or mobile) onsite and remote healthcare professionals for clinical purposes e.g. referral, co-diagnosis, supervision or case review. Healthcare professionals are involved at both ends of this interaction, and a patient may or may not be involved in the same interaction.
Tele-treatment	Refers to interactions between remote healthcare professionals and patients or caregivers for the purpose of direct clinical care e.g. triage, history, examination, diagnosis and treatment. This interaction involves a healthcare professional and a patient or caregiver.
Tele-monitoring	Refers to biomedical and other forms of data collection from patients or through care givers for clinical purposes such as vital signs monitoring and home nursing. This is used in remote chronic disease management e.g. hypertension (blood pressure), diabetes (blood glucose). This interaction may involve a healthcare professional or organization and the patient or caregiver.
Tele-support	Refers to the use of online services for non-clinical purposes to support the patient and caregiver. Such services include education and administrative purposes.

Please refer to the [MOH National Telemedicine Guidelines 2015](#) for more details regarding the obligations of healthcare professionals and organization.

Podiatrists in Singapore abide by the professional practice standards as outlined in the Allied Health Professions Council (AHPC) Code of Professional conduct. Podiatrists who wish to engage in telehealth should possess the appropriate knowledge and skills to provide the level of clinical service required as they would in standard F2F care. Where a F2F consult is not reasonably practical, then delivery of care via telehealth must be better than not having any access to care at all for the patient.

### **Things to consider in your practice:**

1. *Role & application of telehealth in podiatry*

Podiatrists should consider the level and accuracy of assessment via telehealth (eg. podiatrists' skills, limitations of technology support etc), and the risks involved that may affect the diagnosis and treatment provided to patient. Clinicians should also consider the clinical context and goals, and whether tele-consultation is a reasonable and appropriate service for the context.

2. *Standard of care*

The standard of care should be maintained in telehealth, just as clinicians would for standard F2F care. To ensure standard of care, telehealth service must be provided as part of a structured and well-organized system, and the overall standard of care delivered must not be any less compared to a service not involving telehealth.

3. *Communication with patients in telehealth*

Healthcare professionals should be trained in the use of the technology and equipment, and of appropriate behaviors and communication skills required for telehealth interaction.

The podiatrist should also determine if the patient is a suitable candidate for tele-consultation, and this will require a case-by-case basis consideration. Such consideration may include:

- Cognitive ability
- Availability of technology and equipment (eg. phone with video call capabilities)
- Patient's ability to communicate via electronic technology

4. *Informed consent*

Before the commencement of telehealth services, the podiatrist must obtain informed consent from the patient in accordance to the AHPC Code of Professional Conduct and PDPA regulations.

5. *Privacy, patient confidentiality and data security*

All patient records and data must be protected by having a confidentiality policy in place. Podiatrists must comply with national regulations such as the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) and the AHPC Code of Professional Conduct. Podiatrist should therefore ensure steps are taken to prevent unauthorized access, use or accidental disclosure of patient information. One way is to ensure that the platform has a data privacy policy and encryption capabilities.

These are some platforms that have been used in telehealth:

- Doxy.me (telehealth platform)
- Cisco Webex
- Skype

6. *Documentation*

Podiatrists must maintain clear clinical records of care provided over telehealth. These details include the history and assessment, intervention provided, and the technology used. Pictures or videos that were sent by patients, for assessment purposes can be uploaded onto your documentation (eg. clinical manager software) where possible, and should be securely stored.

In line with the National Telemedicine Guidelines, clinics and organizations must have in place clear policies and procedures to handle patients' data with confidentiality. Such policies and procedures specify how patient information is documented, recorded, stored, deleted and retrieved securely.

7. *Clinical outcomes*

Podiatrists should develop a systematic tracking of clinical outcomes, and monitor and improve the quality of their services to achieve best possible outcomes.

8. *Professional indemnity insurance*

For podiatrists with private malpractice insurances, it is recommended to ensure that you are covered for telehealth services.

## Recommendations to Podiatrists

During this period of COVID-19, the Ministry of Health [recommends](#) the use of telehealth where possible. The table below provides some recommendations, but is not limited to, the types Podiatry telehealth services one may provide.

Conditions	Examples	Telehealth Services
Wound Management	Diabetic foot ulcers Pressure sores Potential infections Healed wounds and amputations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment</li><li>• Surveillance</li><li>• Recommendation on self-management and dressing</li><li>• Appropriate onward referral as necessary</li></ul>
Foot pain	Active foot pain that reduces mobility Musculoskeletal conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment</li><li>• Exercise Therapy</li><li>• Footwear Advice</li><li>• Self-management education</li><li>• Appropriate onward referral as necessary</li></ul>
Skin & Nail	Ingrown toe nails Hyperkeratosis Warts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assessment</li><li>• Recommendation on self-management and care</li><li>• Appropriate onward referral as necessary</li></ul>

\*Information referenced from Australian Podiatry Association, 'Telehealth for podiatrists':  
<https://www.podiatry.org.au/about/news/telehealth-for-podiatrists>

Further useful information on telehealth for diabetic wound assessment and surveillance: International Working Group for Diabetic Foot Diseases – Guidelines. COVID-19 & Diabetic Foot Disease (and Telehealth Recommendations): <https://iwgdfguidelines.org/covid-19/>

## References and Resources

1. Ministry of Health (2015), National Telemedicine Guidelines for Singapore [https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh\\_web/home/Publications/guidelines.html](https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/Publications/guidelines.html)
2. Allied Health Professions Council (2013), Code of Professional Conduct [https://www.healthprofessionals.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/forms-and-downloads/150413\\_code-of-professional-conduct\\_ver1.pdf](https://www.healthprofessionals.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/forms-and-downloads/150413_code-of-professional-conduct_ver1.pdf)
3. Personal Data Protection Commission (2020), Personal Data Protection Act Overview <https://www.pdpc.gov.sg/Overview-of-PDPA/The-Legislation/Personal-Data-Protection-Act>
4. Speech and language Therapy Singapore (2020), Telepractice in Speech Therapy, <https://salts.org.sg/telepractice/>
5. Australian Podiatry Association (2020), Telehealth for Podiatrists. <https://www.podiatry.org.au/about/news/telehealth-for-podiatrists>
6. Rogers LC, Lavery LA, Joseph WS, Armstrong DG. All Feet On Deck—The Role of Podiatry During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Preventing hospitalizations in an overburdened healthcare system, reducing amputation and death in people with diabetes. Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association. 2020 Mar 25.
7. Ministry of Health, Continuation of Essential Healthcare Services During Period of Heightened Safe Distancing Measures, 4 April 2020. <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/continuation-of-essential-healthcare-services-during-period-of-heightened-safe-distancing-measures>
8. International Working Group for Diabetic Foot Diseases Guidelines (2020). COVID-19 & Diabetic Foot Disease. <https://iwgdfguidelines.org/covid-19/>