



Frequently Asked Questions

Virtual Care (2023)

This companion document is intended to provide physicians with general advice to support their understanding of the expectations set out in a College Standard of Practice.

This document may be edited or updated for clarity at any time. Please refer back to the document regularly to ensure you are aware of the most recent advice.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of patient concerns can be managed virtually?

Every patient's needs are unique and there are different considerations that play into the type of care that is appropriate for each patient. To proceed with virtual care, you must be satisfied that you can appropriately manage your patient's medical needs to the expected standard of practice through virtual care.

Can I use a "virtual-first" approach for all patient encounters?

In most circumstances, the College does not support a "virtual-first" approach. Using a blanket virtual-first approach can delay necessary care and negatively impact patient safety as well as the healthcare system. Patients with medical needs which clearly require an in-person assessment should not be scheduled for a virtual encounter as part of a "virtual-first" approach.

Does my patient get to choose whether I see them virtually or in-person?

You must always consider what is in the best interests of your patient. This includes consideration for patient preference on modality of assessment. You must also balance the appropriateness and availability of the type of care being sought, with an aim to ensure prudent use of healthcare resources while providing care that is in the best interest of the patient.

My patient lives in a remote and underserviced area where in-person care is not available. Can I provide them with virtual care exclusively?

You must always consider what is in the best interests of your patient. This includes consideration of the patient's healthcare needs and circumstances. If, following careful consideration of these needs and circumstances, you determine that a virtual appointment is in the patient's best interest, you can proceed with providing virtual care with the consent of the patient. You should always clearly document these exceptional circumstances and your rationale for providing virtual care in the patient's medical records.

I do not offer in-person care as part of my practice in NL. Can I provide virtual care exclusively?

You can only continue to provide virtual care if you make an arrangement with another regulated healthcare professional or health authority which allows your patients the ability to access in-person care at a location in NL.

I offer in-person care at my clinic in St. John's and my patient lives in Corner Brook. Can I continue to provide virtual care to this patient?

If you offer in-person care as part of your usual practice of medicine in NL and you can meet all other expectations as set out in the standard of practice, you can continue to provide virtual care.

During a virtual appointment, I reached the opinion that my patient requires an in-person assessment. What should I do?

Explain the need for an in-person assessment and the limitations of virtual care. Offer to see the patient in-person or encourage the patient to obtain an in-person assessment from a local healthcare professional. Document your medical advice in the patient's medical records.

Can I order diagnostic imaging following a virtual care appointment?

If the primary assessment of the patient's medical concerns does not normally include a physical examination, you can proceed with ordering diagnostic imaging. If, however, the primary assessment normally includes a physical examination, you must complete one before ordering diagnostic imaging.

Can I refer a patient to a Royal College specialist following a virtual care appointment?

If the primary assessment of the patient's medical concerns does not normally include a physical examination, you can proceed with the referral. If, however, the primary assessment normally includes a physical examination, you must complete one before making the referral.

Can I prescribe controlled medications through virtual care?

If you meet one (or more) of the following criteria, you can issue a prescription for a controlled medication:

- 1) you have examined the patient in-person,
- 2) you have an ongoing treating relationship with the patient,
- 3) you are in direct communication with another regulated healthcare professional who has examined the patient, or
- 4) after reviewing the patients records, you are satisfied that they have a consisted history of renewed prescriptions for the intended medication.

You must only prescribe controlled medications in accordance with the expected standard of practice for the prescribing of these medications.

Does an Enhanced Virtual Assessment (EVA) qualify as an in-person examination for the purposes of prescribing a controlled medication?

Prior to prescribing any medication, you must conduct an appropriate clinical assessment of the patient, including any examinations which are necessary to meet the expected standard of practice. If conducting an EVA provides you with sufficient clinical information to have an indication to prescribe a controlled medication, you can proceed to issue the prescription. To qualify as an in-person assessment, the EVA must be conducted in a Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS) facility and in accordance with relevant NLHS policies.

Can I prescribe antibiotics through virtual care?

If you can meet the expected standard of practice for the prescribing of the intended medication through a virtual assessment, you can issue a prescription.

Do I need a licence to provide virtual care to a patient in NL?

In most cases, you must hold a licence from the College to provide virtual care to patients in NL. There are some limited exceptions:

- 1) if you are providing specialty care that is not available in NL,
- 2) you are providing care within an existing physician-patient relationship (e.g., your patient has temporarily relocated to NL); or
- 3) you are providing care in consultation with a College-licensed physician.

In these limited circumstances, you do not need to hold a licence from the College.

My patient has temporarily relocated to NL. Do I need a licence from the College to provide virtual care to this patient?

You are permitted to provide continuity of care for your patient while they are temporarily located within NL. A licence from the College is not required.

I am travelling outside of NL. Can I continue to provide virtual care to my patients in NL?

You are permitted by the College to provide continuity of care to patients in NL, provided you can meet the expected standards of practice. You must check with the applicable medical regulatory body where you will be located to determine if there are any applicable licensing requirements.

I am in NL. Can I provide virtual care to a patient outside of NL?

If you are practising medicine in NL, you must hold a licence from the College. You must check with the applicable medical regulatory body where the patient is located to determine if there are any applicable licensing requirements.

I still have questions – who can help me?

Contact the College by [e-mail](#). We will direct your inquiry to the appropriate person at our offices.

Document History

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