



BIOS | BRITISH AND IRISH
ORTHOPTIC SOCIETY

COVID-19 BIOS Update

Advice for telephone consultations and social distancing

Telephone or telemedicine consultation.

Many members are now being asked to undertake telephone or telemedicine review of their non urgent patients. This may include follow up patients undergoing orthoptic treatment or monitoring or decisions about new patient urgency.

This guide provides some simple practical advice for BIOS members conducting remote or virtual consultations (via telephone, video, skype, WhatsApp, Microsoft team or other platforms), where face to face appointments are not possible, in order to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 to you, your patients and the public.

Remote consultations are covered by BIOS PLI, subject to the usual policy terms and conditions and providing you are following appropriate governances, operating within your scope of practice and you continue to maintain accurate records. More detail on your insurance policy can be found here:
<https://www.graybrook.co.uk/bios-members>

Remote consultations should be considered appropriate for:

- clinicians who are self-isolating
- clinicians who are able to work from home with appropriate organisational IG approved systems
- patients who have been risk stratified as low to medium risk
- patients with symptoms of or confirmed COVID-19 infection
- patients who are at high risk of COVID-19 infection
- patients who are worried about attending appointments or who may have heightened anxiety

Remote consultations may not be appropriate if:

- patients have complex clinical needs
- you do not have access to enough information to make a clinical judgment of the management of the clinical case
- the patient is high risk and a face to face consultation is required
- you are unsure of the patient's capacity to consent

Your organisation will have a Policy which relates to the IT solution possible to make a non-face to face consultation and this may include using your own device, using an organisational laptop, VPN access of various level – you must follow your organisational policy and guidance to ensure safe information governance (IG) and you should be up to date with your IG mandatory training.

If you are working in a remote environment (such as at home) for telemedicine consultations:

- do not store personal/confidential patient information on your own device
- use the required organisational log-in and access in line with the IT and IG policy
- check that your internet access is secure for either a phone or video consultation and use the approved platform for any patient interaction e.g. use a Virtual Private Network, avoid public wi-fi and use security features, encryption and ensure anti-virus protection is enabled
- if patients are using a mobile phone, they must be made aware that it can only be as secure as any other phone call on that mobile network
- patients need to be made aware of any precautions required and potential risks of a remote consultation.
- patients should also be informed that the consultation will not be digitally recorded but clinical outcomes from the consultation will be recorded and stored on the patient record
- a remote consultation must be treated as any other consultation in which sensitive or confidential information is safeguarded at all times
- activity can be recorded as a telephone consultation and should be in line with the organisational policy for such recording of activity

Take all possible steps to reduce any risks to patient confidentiality:

- make sure you have the patients consent and recheck the consent is still valid if the consultation is being held in the presence of other orthoptists undertaking similar calls
- take reasonable steps to ensure privacy such as closing the door, putting up notices that a consultation is taking place
- follow your organisation's information security protocols regarding patient confidentiality
- record remote consultations in the same way as any other consultation
- refer to HCPC standards: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/registration/meeting-our-standards/guidance-on-confidentiality/>
- where possible, for patients who are less familiar with the technology you are using, consider doing a test call to allow the patient to try it out and check that the video and audio works before the consultation
- make patients aware that they should not use remote consultation services as an emergency contact

Top Tips summary:

- Do not deviate from your organisational IT and IG policy
- Record all non face-to-face interactions in the same way you would record a face to face interaction
- Gain patient consent for the telemedicine interaction and decision making
- Make decisions within your scope of practice with the information you have available

Social distancing

Please read the most recent Public Health England guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

This guide provides some practical tips for managing face to face consultations and adopting social distancing:

- Stagger and increase clinical template appointment times to reduce the number of patients in one area at one time and you or your team's exposure to high numbers of patients (i.e. cancel alternate slots)
- If you work in an open plan clinic room, do not use bays or channels close to each other
- Configure your waiting room to reduce the number of seating available and spread the seating to avoid close contact of chairs or patients
- Offer a pager if possible and ask patients to wait outside the main clinical area
- Reduce the number of accompanying people attending the assessment area or consultation
- Use the risk stratification your organisation has adopted to only offer appointments to the very high risk / urgent patients
- If a patient is symptomatic for COVID 19, make a clinical judgement whether that assessment can wait for 2 weeks until the patient has self-isolated
- Continue to be familiar with the use of masks or PPE, as this may change
- For medium and low risk patients, undertake telemedicine consultations
- In line with your organisational guidance and national guidance, risk assess your pregnant, over 70's or health vulnerable colleagues, as they may be at risk staying on in work and should be offered work from home activities or duties
- Work in set teams to reduce cross infection and facilitate clinical cover where necessary if one team should become ill