

Importance of telemedicine laid down by COVID-19

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We live in a fast-paced world where digital advancements have helped in the availability of health services without having to meet the patient face to face. The current pandemic has further increased the scope and laid down the importance of telemedicine.

What is Telemedicine?

Telemedicine is the practice of providing healthcare services to patients remotely. Only Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) who is a doctor can consult patients or their caregiver via text message or audio-visual mediums be it in form of SMS, audio-video call, email or skype.

How Telemedicine can benefit patients and caregivers?

The main purpose is to promptly serve healthcare to patients virtually without making distance a hassle. Telemedicine has become an optimal solution to provide timely care to patients who cannot access healthcare services in person because of various reasons, be it their illness or their inability to move and travel to far places to visit a doctor. It is also cost-effective and saves time and effort by reducing the financial costs associated with travel and the inconvenience caused to both the patient and their family. It creates a channel for accessibility and has now paved the roadmap for improved medical care in rural areas as well.

Who can practice Telemedicine?

As per the regulatory standards only a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP) is entitled to practice Telemedicine who follows the same professional and ethical norms and standards laid out by the Board of Governors of the MCI. 'Registered Medical Practitioner' is a person who is enrolled in the State Medical Register or the Indian Medical Register under the IMC Act 1956.

In this, the exchange of information takes place through different tools of communication be it mobile or landline phones and chat platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or other mobile apps.

It is also commonly perceived that the consultation process is free but that is not always true. As per the rules, the RMP is entitled to charge a fee which is declared from before-hand for the consultation as well as a follow up session provided to the patient. It is important to digitally maintain all records both by the patient and the RMP whether it is prescription, invoices or the investigation report of the patient as it helps in future follow up as well as takes care of medicolegal issues.

Telemedicine in the current scenario

As the global pandemic has brought life to a stand-still with social distancing and strict lockdown measures, it has led to the demand of Telemedicine for patients. It is recommended to opt for online consultations as far as possible during this pandemic. In case of an emergency however, it is advised to seek medical help in-person rather than go for teleconsultation as direct visualization of patients is necessary for any intervention. Doctors on teleconsultation have the scope to advise for first aid or do counselling in any emergency and suitably refer to relevant specialist.

When to opt for Telemedicine?

- Patients may consult for diagnosis and counselling for his/her condition
- Patients may be advised about treatment for their condition and drug prescriptions maybe be generated as per rules
- For follow up sessions on on-going treatment
- Avoid tele consultation in emergency where the patients need to visit the doctor for any intervention

Globally, Telemedicine has been recognized as a huge market while in India it is still developing and is bound to grow in the current situation. With a boost from the Ministry of health and family welfare, development of telemedicine and tele-health for medical care in remote areas also has a great future.

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