

Quick Guide to Virtual Care at Unity Health Toronto

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person visits to our hospitals were cancelled and patients did not come to the hospital unless clinically necessary. The pandemic has been a catalyst for the rapid implementation and adoption of virtual care solutions. While many ambulatory clinics are re-opening, virtual care will continue to be part of how health care is delivered into the future. This guide will provide you with some background and some practical resources about virtual care at Unity Health.

Virtual Care

*“Any interaction between patients and/or members of their circle of care, occurring remotely, using **any forms of communication or information technologies**, with the aim of facilitating or maximizing the quality and effectiveness of patient care” .*

-**W**omen’s College Hospital **I**nstitute for **H**ealth Systems Solutions and **V**irtual Care (WIHV)

Virtual Care is not a particular technology, but rather the **application of specific technologies** in the provision of patient care when providers and patients are not in the same physical location. During the COVID pandemic, Unity Health is supporting clinicians as they leverage telephone visits and video conferencing¹ to support virtual care.

Visit Unity Health’s Virtual Care page to learn more about the virtual care applications used by our physicians and health care providers.
<https://covid.unityhealth.to/virtual-appts/>.

Professional Practice

The [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario \(CPSO\)](#) and many regulated health care professional colleges have guideline related to the use of telemedicine/ virtual care. It is important to understand the professional and legal obligations pertaining to various aspects of virtual care.

- Fundamental professional responsibilities do not change when delivering care via telemedicine.
- Use professional judgement to determine where telemedicine is appropriate to meet the standard of care (history taking, medication list, allergies, etc.)
- Obligation to protect patient privacy and confidentiality
- Adherence to [PHIPA legislation](#)
- Requirement to obtain patient consent for participating in a telemedicine appointment. Documentation of consent in the patient’s medical record ([LINK](#))
- Prescribing medication prior to COVID 19 required a phone or fax directly to the pharmacist. [The Ontario College of Pharmacists has a temporary policy.](#)

¹ Often referred to as telemedicine.



Videoconferencing for Direct to Patient Video Visits

Unity Health approves the use of two videoconferencing platforms for direct to patient video visits, connecting physicians and patients using personal computers, tablets or smart phones. One application, OTNInvite, is supported by the [Ontario Telemedicine Network \(OTN\)](#). The hospital also has an enterprise Zoom Health Care license which has a number of privacy and security controls to protect personal health information.

	BEFORE THE VIDEO APPOINTMENT	DURING THE VIDEO APPOINTMENT	AFTER THE VIDEO APPOINTMENT
Privacy Safeguards	<p>SPACE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Private office/clinic ✓ Quiet & soundproofing, if possible ✓ Door closed/window covering drawn ✓ Signage on the door – ‘video appointment in progress’ 	<p>CONFIDENTIALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All participants should be introduced at the beginning of the session, especially individuals who are off screen. ✓ The physician must obtain the patient’s verbal consent to have these individuals present 	<p>DATA PROTECTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Log off clinical systems/shared systems and the video application
Process	<p>Physicians determine which patients are eligible for a home video visit based on their clinical judgement¹ and on their patients’ ability to access and use technology²</p> <p>Video visits are <i>usually</i> scheduled by clinic administrative staff</p> <p>Administrative staff must obtain patient consent for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ email communications ✓ the video appointment 	<p>Physicians obtain Informed Verbal Consent from the patient at the beginning of the appointment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consent should be documented as a part of visit dictation in the patient’s chart <p>Physician - Patient Interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient history • Review of pre-clinic testing • Medication review • Allergies • Interview/Discussion <p>*Limitation: ability to conduct a physical examination</p>	<p>Documentation in the patient’s health record</p> <p>Arrange:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ follow-up appointments ✓ diagnostic tests ✓ prescriptions

References

<http://www.cpso.on.ca/CPSO/media/documents/Policies/Policy-Items/Telemedicine.pdf?ext=.pdf>

http://policyconsult.cpso.on.ca/?page_id=3176

<https://www.cpso.on.ca/Physicians/Policies-Guidance/Policies/Telemedicine>

https://www.cma.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/Virtual-Care-Playbook_mar2020_E.pdf

<https://www.cma.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/virtual-care/ReportoftheVirtualCareTaskForce.pdf>

<https://ontariomd.news/>

https://quorum.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/Users/170/54/10154/Draft%20Clinical%20Guidance_Adopting%20and%20integrating%20virtual%20visits%20into%20care_V1.pdf?ver=2020-03-13-091936-370

<https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/cis/pcs/telehealth-information-package>