

Telehealth standard

Introduction

Telehealth is defined as the use of information and video conferencing technologies, to deliver health services to a patient and transmit health information regarding that patient between two or more locations, at least one of which is within New Zealand.

Telehealth can help provide patients with more convenient access to care, allow for more comprehensive delivery of services after-hours, or when physical access to clinics and dedicated treatment space is restricted, such as in the COVID-19 infection pandemic. Telehealth allows for the more efficient use of health resources and is particularly useful when it is incorporated into an existing system for providing patient care.

In using telehealth, osteopaths should be aware of its limits and ensure that they do not attempt to provide a service, which puts patient safety at risk. In particular, be aware of the inherent risks in providing treatment when a physical examination of the patient is not possible. For the purpose of this standard 'treating' and 'treatment' covers all aspects of the practice of osteopathy including assessing, diagnosing, record keeping and reporting, giving advice and prescribing exercise and rehabilitation programmes.

If osteopaths provide care to New Zealand-based patients from overseas via telehealth, the Osteopathic Council of New Zealand (OCNZ) holds the view that they are practising osteopathy within New Zealand and should therefore be registered with OCNZ. When utilising telehealth, osteopaths are subject to the same requirements as osteopaths registered and practising in New Zealand. These include complying with OCNZ Capabilities for Osteopathic Practice, the OCNZ Code of Ethics and/or Code of Conduct, and being subject to the complaints resolution processes of the office of the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). OCNZ will also notify the appropriate regulatory authorities in other countries if concerns are raised about a particular osteopath.

The New Zealand Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights 1996 establishes the rights of patients and places obligations on osteopaths with respect to telehealth, as they do with all other forms of health care. This includes informing patients about the provision of telehealth services and seeking the patient's informed consent before the telehealth service is provided.

Definitions

The Council has defined the following terms as:

In-person: Where the osteopath and patient are physically present in the same consultation room.

Telehealth: The use of information and video conferencing technologies, to deliver health services to a patient and transmit health information regarding that patient between two or more locations, at least one of which is within New Zealand.

Video consultation: Where the osteopath and patient use information and video conferencing technologies to communicate with each other and visual and audio information are exchanged in real time, but the osteopath and patient are not physically present in the same consultation room. A video consultation can be conducted between an osteopath and patient in the presence of another health practitioner, advocate and/or support person, or it can be conducted with no such support at the patient's end.

1. Telehealth scope of practice

This standard applies to osteopaths registered with the Osteopathic Council in New Zealand and practising telehealth in New Zealand and/or overseas, and osteopaths who are overseas and provide health services through telehealth to patients in New Zealand. In both these instances, the osteopaths must be registered and hold a current Annual Practising Certificate (APC).

2. Providing care

2.1. Any device, software or service used for telehealth must be secure, only allowing the intended recipients to receive and record, and must be able to preserve the quality of the information or image being transmitted.

OCNZ expects the treatment provided to a patient in another location meets the same required standards as care provided in an in-person consultation.

This includes standards relating to:

- patient selection, cultural competence, assessment, diagnosis, informed consent, maintaining the patient's privacy and confidentiality, updating the patient's clinical records and follow-up.
- If, because of the limits of technology, the same standard of service cannot be provided as an in-person consultation then the patient must be advised of this limitation.

2.2. It is particularly important that consideration is given to whether a physical examination would add critical information before providing treatment to a patient or before referring the patient to another health practitioner for services such as diagnostic imaging. If a physical examination is likely to add critical information, then it should not proceed until a physical examination can be arranged. In some circumstances, it may be reasonable to ask another health practitioner in the patient's locality to conduct the physical examination. In those instances, it is important that the patient's informed consent be obtained and communicated clearly for that arrangement, and the referring osteopath is available to answer any queries.

2.3. When working with or receiving reports from health providers using telehealth, osteopaths should ensure that the above standards are followed and must notify that telehealth provider, their management and other appropriate reporting channels if there are concerns about the quality of care being provided.

3. Providing care to a patient located outside New Zealand

3.1. Osteopaths providing care from New Zealand to patients in another country:

- remain subject to New Zealand law
- may be subject to other legal obligations, requirements or liabilities in the location where the patient is located
- may also be subject to the jurisdiction of authorities in the patient's home country
- may be liable if the patients are assisted to contravene that country's laws or regulations, for example, any importation and possession requirements.
- legal advice should be sought in that country, if necessary.

4. Insurers and third-party payers

Osteopaths must understand and abide by the policies or recommendations of insurers or third-party payers regarding telehealth. If the insurers or third-party payer policy is unclear, they should be contacted before any assessment and treatment are undertaken.

References and resources:

[The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights](#)

[OCNZ Capabilities for Osteopathic Practice](#)

[OCNZ Code of Ethics](#)

OCNZ Code of Conduct (in development)

[Guidelines for Informed Consent](#)

[NZ Telehealth Resource Centre](#)

[Telehealth Standards - Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand](#)