

Video Consultations: Guidance for Community Pharmacies

Introduction

This practical guide, written specifically for community pharmacy teams outlines when and how to run video consultations with patients, which are delivered within community pharmacies. It includes lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic in primary care and secondary care, where the use of video consultations has increased by over 133% in March 2020.¹

Video consultations have played an important role in the NHS response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we want to continue to support the uptake and use of video consultations across community pharmacy services.

Benefits

Video consultations can provide benefits for community pharmacy contractors and teams to support the delivery of more efficient patient care. Increasing video consultations in addition to face-to-face pharmacy visits will help:

- Reduce infection control risks e.g. Covid-19;
- Reduce patient travel, potentially aiding those that are vulnerable and rural-based patients, and respond towards achieving a greener NHS
- Increase patient choice in how they want to access services, which will reduce demand on other parts of the NHS, although patients which opt for face-to-face meetings should be able to continue to access care in this way; and
- Improve the options and services provided via the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF)²

Evidence

A number of randomised trials have focused on the use of video consultations with patients and found:

- Higher satisfaction among patients and clinicians.³
- Evidence has also reported on patient outcomes, cost effectiveness, safety, technical issues, impact of video consultations on healthcare delivery, and quality of consultations.³

1. When are video consultations appropriate?

Existing specifications and guidance support community pharmacy video consultations:

Pharmacy Service	Rationale
New Medicines Service (NMS)	Service specification refers to ability to use 'telephone call', which can also be a video consultation, with patient agreement.
NHS Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS) - both from 111 and GP referral to CPCS	Service specification includes reference to use of remote consultation and use of video, with patient agreement.

¹ NHS Digital. [Appointments in general practice](#) — March 2020.

² NHS England and NHS Improvement. [Clinical guide for the management of remote consultations and remote working in secondary care during the coronavirus pandemic](#). – November 2020.

³ Car J, Choon-Huat Koh G, Sym Foong P, Wang, C J. [Video consultations in primary and specialist care during the covid-19 pandemic and beyond](#). BMJ 2020; 371

Local Authority commissioned services e.g. sexual health consultations and smoking cessation services	A rationale may be provided within local specifications or amendments to these, depending on the view of the local commissioner and service delivery organisations.
Pharmacy Integration Fund pilots, including smoking cessation from secondary care pilots	Includes remote provision as an option. The current pilot area has started with remote provision only. The National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training (NCSCT) has published guidance about remote provision of services
Discharge Medicines Service (DMS)	Consultations must be undertaken in a consultation room compliant with the requirements or via telephone or video consultation, where those remote options are chosen to meet the need of the patient, or because NHSE&I have agreed the pharmacy is too small for a consultation room to be fitted. (From PSNC DMS FAQs)




Some pharmacy services may help a patient to check and confirm that they do not have any COVID-19 symptoms before they attend the pharmacy.


Community pharmacists should generally not use video consultation for:

- Assessing patients with potential serious, high-risk conditions likely to need a physical examination (including high-risk groups for poor outcomes from Covid-19 who are unwell)
- Co-morbidities affecting the patient's ability to use the technology (e.g. confusion), or serious anxieties about the technology (unless relatives are on hand to help)
- Some patients with disabilities e.g. deaf or hard-of-hearing patients may find video difficult, although video can offer an alternative to the telephone if they can lip-read and/or are able to use the chat function.
- It is recognised that some patients may not have access to technology that can enable video conferencing.

Challenges and optimising VC processes

Early feedback from community pharmacy video consultation pilots in North of England and Midlands regions have identified some challenges which we aim to resolve, as we are keen to help encourage the use of video consultation within community pharmacy:

As an alternative to telephone consultations	
 	<p>Video consultations are more time consuming compared to telephone consultations. Video consultation requires the pharmacist to go into the consultation room and set up before starting. Some pharmacists found this difficult to fit into their day due to the typical working in a pharmacy where pharmacists work simultaneously to check prescriptions prior to administering, provide advice to patients, supervise self-care sales, lead the team and deliver services.</p> <p>However, once underway with the video consultation, pharmacists found it really useful being able to see the patient as well as listen to them</p>
For untrained pharmacy staff	
	<p>There was insufficient community pharmacy specific training about running a video consultation, so although they understood how to use the system and the requirements around consent and confidentiality, there was little information provided about how they might use it effectively for their specific needs.</p>
For digitally excluded patients	

	All patients need to receive a joining link, so a small amount of additional set up and appointment booking administration is involved. Not all patients have access to a smartphone, PC or tablet.
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Further information

- Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) [Remote consultation skills e-learning](#)

2. How can a community pharmacy get set up to deliver effective video consultations with patients?

Some recommended steps are set out below:

Decide a plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community pharmacy staff meeting • Agree the types of services offered by your pharmacy that will benefit from a video consultation • Agree what hardware and software to use • Share the plans with staff and listen to and address concerns
Set up technology and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the internet connection (preferably fast broadband) • Select and install video call software and familiarise staff with tech equipment such as a webcam and microphone • Update hardware and software and check audio/video works • Prepare patient information, including the type of technology they will need to attend the virtual appointment (the NHS patient guide may also assist - here and here) • Set up the equipment in the room
Set up the workflows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the pharmacy website with information on online / virtual appointments • Put standard operating processes in place for scheduled and unscheduled appointments • Make contingency plans for steps to take if video link fails e.g. contact patient by telephone.
Train and test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff to use the new system and assess they are competent • Test the technical aspects by making a dummy call • Test the process with staff, include how to make an entry in the patient's record and arrange a follow-up • Test the process with a patient/ layperson • Use the supplier training packages, where available • Staff have access to information that is relevant to the patient need
Go live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team review after first session • Set up staff and patient feedback to improve the process

Further information

- Video consultations can be delivered through a range of hardware solutions, including laptops with integrated webcams, desktops with linked webcams, tablets and smartphones. Pharmacies providing video consultations will require the appropriate technology and equipment within their consulting room in order to undertake the consultation.
- Information on software required
 - [Information on MS Teams and how to use it.](#)
 - [Digital First online consultation and video consultation \(DFOCVC\) framework](#) which is assured nationally to meet essential standards. From July 2021, there was 30+ online and video consultation Catalogue Solutions available on the DFOCVC framework.
- [NHSD technical guidance](#) and [security considerations](#)

- Data Security: Guidance has been produced by the Information Governance Alliance (IGA): [Using videoconferencing for service user consultations](#)
- Information Governance: NHSX have produced [guidance on using Video Conferencing and Consultation Tools in January 2021](#), which offers guidance for patients and service users, as well as healthcare staff

3. How to conduct a video consultation?

<p>Before the consultation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange the appointment slot and check it is appropriate for the patient. • Ask the patient if they would like a family member or friend to join them during the consultation. • Send link with the appointment slot to the patient's phone or email address. • For video consultations use a private, well-lit room, and ask patient to do the same. • Take and confirm the patient's telephone number and email address in case the video link fails. • Ensure you have access to the clinical systems. • On the day, check that the technology is working.
<p>Start the consultation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate the consultation by calling or inviting the patient. • Say something: e.g. "Can you hear me?", "Can you see me?" to prompt patient to optimise the technical set-up. • The consent of the patient is usually implied by them accepting the invitation and joining the video consultation on the day/date/time of the appointment unless you have opted for a process to capture consent separately before or during the video call. • Introductions: staff need to formally introduce themselves, explain how the appointment will work, and the time they have. • Ask the patient to introduce themselves and confirm that they are able to talk confidentially, either alone or that with relatives / carers present on the video consultation with them. • Safeguarding flag – remember some adult and child patients will be living in close proximity to an abuser/absence of care given (neglect). Safeguarding protocols should still apply. Use professional curiosity on telephone/video calls.
<p>Having a video consultation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions during video consultation work similarly to face-to-face interactions, but discussions may feel less fluent and there may be technical glitches (e.g. blurry picture or temporary loss of sound). • You do not need to look at the camera to demonstrate that you are engaged. Looking at the screen is fine. • Inform the patient when you are otherwise occupied, e.g. taking notes or reading something on another screen. • Appointments that take place over the video will still need notes and outcomes to be captured as they would be for a face-to-face appointment.
<p>Closing the consultation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be particularly careful to summarise key points, since it is possible something could have been missed due to technical interference. • Ask the patient if they need anything clarified. • Confirm (and record) if the patient is happy to use video again for their next appointment • To end, tell the patient you are going to close the call now, and say goodbye (before actually closing the connection).

Further information

- NHS Staff: NHS England have published a quick [step-by-step guide aimed at NHS staff](#) which covers practical tips on running a video consultation, as well an online consultation toolkit for primary care in January 2020.

- Pharmacists and their teams should follow all the [General Pharmaceutical Council advice and guidance](#) in relation to delivering video consultations either within the pharmacy or remotely
- [PSNC guidance](#)
- [Royal Pharmaceutical Society guidance](#) (Registration needed)
- [National Royal College of General Practitioners guidance](#)
- The National Pharmacy Association has confirmed that indemnity insurance extends to cover video/telephone consultations if there are secure systems (recommended by the GPhC) in place, but we would not cover remote prescription checking.

4. How to prepare patients for video consultations?

These template bullet points serves as a general guide, and can be communicated to patients at the relevant time:

Decide if video is right for you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a telephone call will do, or a face-to-face consultation is more appropriate, a video consultation may not be needed
Set up technology and communication	<p>Factors to help a video call:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good internet connection • A quiet place where you will not be interrupted • A computer, tablet or smartphone with a built-in camera and microphone • Test audio and video connection so that you can see and hear (or get someone to do this for you) • Check the community pharmacy website for what else you need to do (different video platforms have slightly different set-up steps) • Consider sending NHS England and NHS Improvement guidance on video consulting with your NHS, a quick step-by-step guide for patients which explains the benefits of a video consultation, and provides practical guidance on how to start, have and finish a video consultation.
Booking and connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a video appointment by following instructions from your community pharmacy (on community pharmacy website) • Just before your appointment time, click on the connection link and wait • When you are connected you will see and hear the pharmacist • Make sure the pharmacist knows your telephone number so they can call you back if the video link fails
Having the consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the screen • Use the screen camera to show things, e.g. a rash • If you get cut off and cannot reconnect, wait for a telephone call or try to call the pharmacy and explain you got cut off and need to speak again with the person you were speaking with on the video consultation • Write down any advice or instructions, and make sure you understand the next steps • When the consultation comes to an end, you may hang up by clicking on the red phone icon to disconnect.

Further information

- NHS England and NHS Improvement guidance on [video consulting with your NHS](#) is a quick step-by-step guide for patients which explains the benefits of a video consultation and provides practical guidance on how to start, have and finish a video consultation.
- [Video consultations: information for GPs](#). University of Oxford.
- [Principles for supporting high quality consultations by video in general practice during covid-19](#). Royal College of General Practitioners.

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