

Dear Practitioner

## **GUIDANCE ON THE APPLICATION OF TELEMEDICINE GUIDELINES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The exponential increase in the number of reported cases of COVID-19 in South Africa led to the declaration of the National State of Disaster by the government. Key basic measures that could help prevent the further spread of the disease, mainly are, self-isolation and social distancing. Practitioners are faced with an ethical dilemma of how to contribute to the national endeavors of self-isolation and social distancing and continue to be accessible to their patients within the current Telemedicine framework of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

In view of the current national state of Disaster, the announcement of a 21 days nationwide-lockdown and recognizing that practitioners render essential services which must be carried out with reasonable skills and/or competency and safety to both the practitioner and patients, the HPCSA hereby provides the following guide in the application of the Telemedicine Guidelines as contained in Booklet 10 of the Guidelines For Good Practice in the Healthcare Professions:

- a) “Telemedicine” is hereby replaced with “Telehealth” which includes amongst others, Telemedicine, Telepsychology, Telepsychiatry, Telerehabilitation, etc., and involves remote consultation with patients using telephonic or virtual platforms of consultation.
- b) Telehealth is only permissible in circumstances where there is an already established practitioner-patient relationship, except where Telepsychology and/or Telepsychology is involved, in which case telehealth is permissible even without an established practitioner-patient relationship.
- c) Practitioners may charge a fee for services rendered through a telehealth platform.
- d) Where practitioners are in doubt whether a telehealth consultation will be in the best interest of the patient, they are encouraged to advise patients to present themselves for a face-to-face consultation to seek assistance at a health care facility closest to them.



This guideline is only applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The HPCSA shall, soon after the end of the pandemic, inform practitioners of when this guidance will cease to apply.

Practitioners should always endeavor to ensure that they always adhere to the provisions of Ethical Rule 27 A of the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners Registered Under the Health Professions Act.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M A Kwinda', is written over a horizontal line.

**DR M A KWINDA**

**ACTING REGISTRAR/CEO**

**26 March 2020**