

Telehealth Policy

Introduction

This document is a joint Acupuncture New Zealand (AcNZ) and New Zealand Acupuncture Standards Authority Inc (NZASA) profession wide policy. It outlines the main considerations for acupuncturists who may wish to consider the use of Telehealth and technology-based consultations as part of their practice.

AcNZ and the NZASA recognise that acupuncture is primarily a hands-on treatment modality, involving the physical application of acupuncture needles. However, we also recognise that the fuller modality that is acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has many other aspects and treatment techniques which can readily be applied in a Telehealth setting.

Registered acupuncturists should fully recognise the limitations of providing Telehealth consultations which can only provide non needling aspects of TCM (aside from the use of press needles). They should also ensure that they do not attempt to provide a service which puts patient safety at risk. They must be aware of the inherent risks in providing treatment when a physical examination of the patient is not possible. As such, acupuncture consultations via Telehealth should only be used as an adjunct to in-person consultations and generally for a limited time.

Registered members of AcNZ and NZASA who also prescribe Chinese herbal medicine as part of their scope of practice may find a wider use for Telehealth consultations. This policy should be used as an example of best practice for the use of Telehealth to provide Chinese herbal medicine consultations.

Telehealth - with acknowledged limitations - can allow for a more comprehensive delivery of acupuncture services after-hours, or when a patient finds it difficult to have regular access to in-person treatment. It can also provide continuity of care when physical access to dedicated treatment spaces is restricted, such as in the COVID-19 pandemic or during the Christchurch earthquakes.

This policy applies to practitioners registered with either AcNZ or NZASA that practice Telehealth in New Zealand and/or overseas. Registered acupuncturist must hold a current Annual Practicing Certificate at the time of giving any Telehealth consultation.

Definitions

AcNZ and the NZASA have defined the following terms as:

In-person: Where the practitioner and patient are physically present in the same consultation room or physical setting.

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

Video consultation: Where the practitioner 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 practitioner and patient are not physically present in the same physical location.

Treating and Treatment: For the purpose of this policy, **treating** and **treatment** in the telehealth environment **excludes** the placement of acupuncture needles applied by the practitioner but covers all aspects of the practice of acupuncture including:

- Assessment: history taking including TCM assessment, assessment and outcome measures, pain and functionality scales and physical visual assessments such as range of motion assessment and tongue diagnosis.
- Traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis
- Prescribing and delivery of appropriate Chinese herbal medicines and formulae
- The provision of **treatment** in a Telehealth situation is limited to advising and directing the patient on the self-administration of any or all of the following:
 - Acupressure
 - The safe placement of press tacks and press beads
 - Cupping - using silicone or suction cups with a pump only (instruction on fire cupping is **not** to be given)
 - Indirect moxibustion therapy using stick moxa only
 - Qi gong and Tai Chi exercises
 - Exercises or stretches
 - Gua sha
 - Simplified, self-administered tuina techniques and meridian massage techniques (these techniques must fit within the practitioners' scope of practice prior to using them in a consultation).
 - Dietary and lifestyle advice tailored to the individual TCM diagnosis.

1. Providing Care

1.1. Any device, software or service you use for the purposes of Telehealth should be secure and fit for purpose, only allowing the intended recipients to receive and record, and It must preserve the quality of the information or image being transmitted.

1.2. Telehealth technology interface must meet the requirements outlined by the by the [New Zealand Telehealth Resource Centre](#).

1.3. In using Telehealth, you should be aware of its limits and ensure that you do not attempt to provide a service which puts patient safety at risk.

1.4. Practitioners should make certain to utilise all available diagnostic methods and tools, including the taking of a complete history, visual observations of patient and movement, auditory observation of voice and respiratory state, and asking with respect to all bodily, mental and emotional function, as objective palpation will be unavailable

1.5. Practitioners must adhere to all of the professional standards set by their registering body, best practice standards and relevant New Zealand laws. When delivering Telehealth consultations practitioners must:

- Ensure that Telehealth services are provided in alignment with the ACNZ and NZASA joint Telehealth policy.
- Adhere to the Standards and Codes of Practice set out by your registering body (AcNZ or NZASA).
- Adhere to your obligations as a treatment provider as set out in [Health and Disability Commissioner \(Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights\) Regulations 1996](#)
- Adhere to your legal responsibilities as set out in the [Health Information Privacy Code 1994](#)

1.6. It is expected that the treatment you provide to a patient in another physical location meets the same required standards as care provided in consultation held in-person. This includes standards relating to:

- identification;
- cultural competence;
- assessment (excluding physical palpation and pulse diagnosis);
- diagnosis;
- consent;
- maintaining the patient's privacy and confidentiality (1);
- updating the patient's clinical records and
- communicating.

If, because of the limits of technology, you are unable to provide a service to the same standard as an in-person consultation then you must advise the patient of this.

(1) See also the section on 'Privacy and confidentiality' on page 11, of [the Royal Australasian College of Physicians' Telehealth: Guidelines and practical tips.](#)

2. Obtaining patient consent

Verbal consent

2.1. Make sure the patient

- is fully informed with regards to the limitations of a virtual consultation,
- can make an informed choice, and
- that they provide their consent before providing a Telehealth service.

2.2. While a written consent is not required, patients still need to provide their verbal consent. The practitioner must record the verbal consent in the written clinical record. If you propose a new treatment method in a subsequent consultation you must record verbal consent from the patient after an adequate explanation is given and the patient is fully informed.

2.3. You must record that you have discussed any risks or adverse effects that the treatment method may hold in order for the patient to be fully informed.

3. Note taking

3.1. Practitioners utilising Telehealth consultations must adhere to the same standards of clinical record keeping as stipulated by their registering body.

In all cases full, accurate and legible clinical records are expected to be kept and must include:

- A record of the information provided as part of the informed consent process and a record of verbal consent being given by the patient.
- All relevant clinical information.
- Feedback on progress. Provide objective and subjective assessment measures. You should use meaningful patient specific outcome measures such as pain scales, range of motion testing and functionality scales. These should be assessed with each treatment to measure progress and documented.
- Any information or advice provided to the patient.
- Treatment delivered.
- All correspondence with the patient (via email, video or telephone) must be recorded in the patient notes indicating it was a Telehealth intervention, i.e. state type of contact and confirm consent was given at all times.

4. Insurers and third-party payers

Registered acupuncturists must be fully aware of and abide by the policies or recommendations of insurers or third-party payers (eg ACC) regarding Telehealth. If the insurers or third-party payer policy is unclear, they should be contacted before any assessment and treatment are undertaken.

5. Providing care to a patient located outside New Zealand

5.1. Acupuncturists registered with AcNZ or NZASA who provide 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.

5.2. Members of AcNZ or NZASA who provide Telehealth services to patients overseas will be subject to the standards of their registering body (rather than the standards applicable in the location of the patient) in relation to your conduct and fitness to practise.

Acknowledgements:

This document has relied on the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand's Telehealth Standard and Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand's Allied Health Best Practice Guide for Telehealth. We thank the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand and Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand for their generosity in allowing us to use and appropriately amend their documents.

Related Resources:

1. [Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand. Allied Health Best Practice Guide for Telehealth.](#) 2018
2. [The Royal Australasian College of Physicians'. Telehealth: Guidelines and practical tips.](#)
3. [New Zealand Telehealth Resource Centre](#)
4. [Physiotherapy New Zealand. Telehealth Standard.](#) 2018
5. [Medical Council of New Zealand - Telehealth.](#) 2020
6. [AcNZ Code of Professional Ethics.](#) 2016
7. [AcNZ Guidelines for Clinical Notes.](#) 2017
8. [AcNZ Incident Reporting Form](#)
9. [AcNZ rules](#)
10. [NZASA Standards, Codes and Ethics](#)
11. [NZASA Informed Consent Guidelines](#)
12. [TAPS ASA Guideline for Advertising Services](#)