Covid-19: remote consultations
A quick guide to assessing patients by video or voice call

This graphic, intended for use in a primary care setting, is based on data available in March 2020, much of which is from hospital settings in China. It will be revised as more relevant data emerges.

1. Set up
Prepare yourself and decide how to connect
- Have current ‘stay at home’ covid-19 guidance on hand
  - ON government advice: tinyurl.com/wedyeqq
- Video is useful for
  - Severe illness
  - Anxious patients
  - Comorbidities
  - Hard of hearing
- Scan medical record for risk factors such as:
  - Diabetes
  - Pregnancy
  - Smoking
  - Chronic kidney or liver disease
  - COPD
  - Steroids or other immunosuppressants
  - Cardiovascular disease
  - Asthma

2. Connect
Make video link if possible, otherwise call on the phone
- Check video and audio
  - Can you hear/see me?
- Confirm the patient’s identity
  - Name
  - Date of birth
- Check where patient is
  - Where are you right now?
- Note patient’s phone number in case connection fails
- If possible, ensure the patient has privacy

3. Get started
Quickly assess whether sick or less sick
- Rapid assessment
  - If they sound or look very sick, such as too breathless to talk, go direct to key clinical questions
- Establish what the patient wants out of the consultation, such as:
  - Clinical assessment
  - Referral
  - Certificate
  - Reassessment
  - Advice on self isolation

4. History
Adapt questions to patient’s own medical history
- Contacts
  - Close contact with known covid-19 case
  - Immediate family member unwell
  - Occupational risk group
- History of current illness
  - Date of first symptoms
- Most common presentation
  - Cough
  - Fatigue
  - Fever
  - Short of breath
- Cough is usually dry but spuutum is not uncommon
- Up to 50% of patients do not have fever at presentation

5. Examination
Assess physical and mental function as best as you can
- Over phone, ask carer or patient to describe:
  - State of breathing
  - Colour of face and lips
- Over video, look for:
  - General demeanour
  - Skin colour
- Check respiratory function - inability to talk in full sentences is common in severe illness
  - How is your breathing?
  - Is it worse today than yesterday?
  - What does your breathlessness prevent you doing?
- Patient may be able to take their own measurements if they have instruments at home
  - Temperature
  - Pulse
  - Peak flow
  - Blood pressure
  - Oxygen saturation
- Interpret self monitoring results with caution and in the context of your wider assessment

6. Decision and action
Advise and arrange follow-up, taking account of local capacity
- Likely covid-19 but well, with mild symptoms
  - Acetaminophen
  - Swab as per current guidelines
- Likely covid-19, unwell, deteriorating
  - Arrange follow up by video
  - Monitor closely if you suspect pneumonia
- Relevant comorbidities
  - Proactive, whole patient care
- Unwell and needs admission
  - Ambulance protocol
  - Reduce spread of virus – follow current government ‘stay at home’ advice
  - Safety netting
    - If living alone, someone to check on them
    - Maintain fluid intake – 6 to 8 glasses per day
  - Seek immediate medical help for red flag symptoms

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