



General  
Osteopathic  
Council

## Statement on remote consultations – key principles

The UK Health and Care regulators, including the GOC, issued a [joint statement on 3 March 2020](#), on how they will carry out their regulatory roles during the Coronavirus situation. This includes recognition that:

'in highly challenging circumstances, professionals may need to depart from established procedures in order to care for patients and people using health and social care services. Our regulatory standards are designed to be flexible and to provide a framework for decision-making in a wide range of situations. They support professionals by highlighting the key principles which should be followed, including the need to work cooperatively with colleagues to keep people safe, to practise in line with the best available evidence, to recognise and work within the limits of their competence, and to have appropriate indemnity arrangements relevant to their practice.'

In light of the COVID-19 virus situation, many osteopaths are undertaking remote consultations with patients, on the phone or online. As a result, the GOC has developed this policy statement, which echoes the key principles of a [joint statement published in November 2019 by several healthcare regulators](#) in relation to undertaking of remote consultations and the prescription of medicines online. The GOC were not party to this statement, as osteopaths are not able to prescribe medications, but in light of the current situation we have adapted this statement removing references to prescribing. Any further modifications to the joint statement are simply to put these in an osteopathic context.

Remote consultations can be helpful for patients. Advice and reassurance can help patients manage their own health at times when a face to face interaction is not possible.

However, there are potential risks involved in the provision of remote consultations, and patients can expect to have safeguards in place to protect them when they receive advice and guidance remotely, just as they would in normal circumstances. Such safeguards are necessary whether the consultation happens as a continuing treatment with someone already seen in person, or as a new or one-off patient where there has been no prior interaction.

### Key principles

The following ten high level principles are expected to apply to osteopaths providing remote consultations:

1. Make patient safety the first priority and where appropriate raise concerns if the service or system they are working in does not have adequate patient safeguards including appropriate identity and verification checks.

2. Understand how to identify vulnerable patients and take appropriate steps to protect them.
3. If unfamiliar with the patient, tell them their name, role and professional registration details, establish a dialogue and make sure that all patients understand how the remote consultation is going to work.
4. Explain that:
  - a) They can only provide advice and guidance if they feel that it is safe to do so.
  - b) It's not safe if they don't have sufficient information about the patient's health or if remote care is unsuitable to meet their needs.
  - c) It may be unsafe if relevant information is not shared with other healthcare providers involved in their care.
  - d) If in their judgement they can't provide advice or guidance to the patient because it's unsafe to do so, they will signpost to other appropriate services.
5. Obtain informed consent: ensuring it is provided voluntarily by an appropriately informed person with the capacity to consent to the intervention in question in accordance with the requirements of the [Osteopathic Practice Standards](#) in this respect.
6. Undertake sufficient assessment to establish a clinical rationale for the provision of advice and any remote intervention, where possible with access to existing records in the case of continuing patients.
7. Give patients information about all the options available to them, including declining treatment, in a way they can understand.
8. Make appropriate arrangements for follow-up care where indicated. If appropriate, and with the patient's consent, share information with other health and care providers for the enhancement of their care.
9. Keep notes that fully explain and justify the decisions they make.
10. Stay up to date with relevant training, support and guidance for providing healthcare in a remote context.

### **The Osteopathic Practice Standards**

Any intervention with a patient, whether face to face or remote, must be undertaken within the framework of the [Osteopathic Practice Standards](#). Although any or all standards may be relevant given the circumstances of any individual case, the following should particularly be borne in mind when offering remote consultations:

- A3. You must give patients the information they want or need to know in a way they can understand.
- A4. You must receive valid consent for all aspects of examination and treatment, and record this as appropriate.

- A5. You must support patients in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their own health and wellbeing.
- B2. You must recognise and work within the limits of your training and competence.
- C2. You must ensure that your patient records are comprehensive, accurate, legible and completed promptly.
- C4. You must take action to keep patients from harm
- C6. You must be aware of your wider role as a healthcare professional to contribute to enhancing the health and wellbeing of your patients.
- D5. You must respect your patients' rights to privacy and confidentiality, and maintain and protect patient information effectively.

### **Further guidance**

The Institute of Osteopathy has produced some [guidance for osteopaths](#) on the practicalities of undertaking remote consultations.

General Osteopathic Council  
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