It is no secret that ‘things have changed’ since the onset of Covid-19 and subsequent living and working restrictions. The realm of digital has taken off and an industry ripe for this change is healthcare.

Technology can help address the supply and demand, for example, by assisting practitioners with their admin, thus streamlining the running of their practice to free them up to consult with treat and their patients. Already in existence prior to lockdown, telehealth has been given a huge boost by the need for patients to still see their practitioners.

**Telehealth**

Neil Kinsley, CEO of Medici, a telehealth app, points out: ‘Telehealth has been practised for a number of years. Each time practitioner and patient send a message to one another or have a consultation over a telephone, this is telehealth.’ Nowadays, telehealth includes the ability for this communication to occur through different channels and mediums: voice, text and/or video over mobile phone, through different channels and mediums: the ability for this communication to occur is telehealth. Nowadays, telehealth includes and patient send a message to one another or have a consultation over a telephone, this is telehealth.’

PoPi compliant too. A critical question that practitioners and patients should be asking themselves when engaging in telehealth, is whether the platform was specifically made for healthcare use or not. If it was not, it is likely not secure,’ says Kinsley.

**Practice management**

One of the greatest drawbacks to fully embracing telehealth, for both the practitioner and the patient, has been the billing and claiming for consultations that are done remotely. ‘To date, few checks and balances have been in place when it comes to virtual consulting, with practitioners relying on memory and rudimentary means to tally up consulting times spent on a particular patient, then coding them before submitting to the medical aid scheme for payment’, says Deon Bührs, Global Group Executive: Operations at ProfNet Medical (who created EZMed). To assist with this problem, a practice management software programme like EZMed, combined with Medici’s telehealth application, has given practitioners the ability to precisely track their patient interactions, which are then pulled through into the practice management billing system. The EZMed platform’s ‘intelligence’ makes provision for certain coding checkpoints along the way to ensure that the practitioner captures the correct information, which is then automatically submitted to the medical aid scheme for payment. (EZMed is integrated into all 83+ medical aids.)

**Data security**

‘Data security is the minimum requirement for a good telehealth platform. It needs to be PoPi compliant too. A critical question that practitioners and patients should be asking

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**Steps for a better webside manner**

1. **Consent:** Make sure the relevant permissions have been given with a view to conducting a virtual consulting session.
2. **Practitioner professionalism:** Look smart - banish the comfy lounge tops till the weekend; act smart - maintain the same professional demeanour as you would in face-to-face interaction and be engaged and focused; sit smart (or stand straight if using a standing desk) – this also includes screen placement so you can still look at each other eye to eye.
3. **Minimise external disturbances:** Turn off your mobile phone (switch to airplane mode) so that you are not disturbed, and banish the background screen saver as they are distracting.
4. **Network connection:** Internet connectivity can go offline or signal can be weak so have a plan upfront to deal with this and agree who will call who back. To minimise interruptions though, minimise the number of devices connected to your internet at any one time – this applies equally to practitioners and the patients.
5. **Be prepared:** Practitioners and patients should be ready in advance of the consultation with all notes. If you are sharing a screen, make sure all other documents are closed so you are not inadvertently sharing someone else’s information.
6. **Finish up:** Make sure you close out and finish you online session when done. Remain silent until you are 100% sure the connection has closed.
7. **Take a break:** When working from home or remotely, there is a greater likelihood of being inactive (lots of sitting). To keep alert and able to focus on patients’ needs, it is important to physically move between consultations. Being focused will mean everyone will benefit from the healthcare interaction.

More information can be found at: https://www.ezmed.solutions