

Implementation of Teleconsultation in European Dentistry

Teledentistry refers to using telecommunication technology to provide dental care and services remotely. It encompasses patient consultation, diagnosis, treatment planning, education, and management of dental conditions. Teledentistry can be delivered through various means, such as video conferencing, telephone calls, and the exchange of digital images and clinical information. Teledentistry aims to improve access to dental care by reducing barriers related to distance, mobility, and resource distribution. It also aims to contribute to the efficiency of dental care delivery and facilitate patient education and self-management of oral health. Teleconsultation is the possibility of conducting a medical consultation and informed consent for future procedures remotely through secure online communication.

Arguments supporting Teleconsultation:

- **Increased access to care:** Teleconsultation can reduce barriers and improve access to care for individuals in remote areas or with mobility issues.
- **Improved efficiency and reduced costs:** Teleconsultations can save time and resource usage potentially leading to reduced healthcare costs.
- **Enhanced continuity of care:** Teleconsultations can facilitate ongoing communication and monitoring between patients and dentists, improving care continuity.
- **Reduced risk of transmission of infectious diseases:** Teleconsultations can decrease the risk of exposure to communicable diseases in both clinical settings and public transportation.
- **Sustainability:** Teleconsultation can protect the environment by decreasing travel and use of materials.
- **Improved Quality of Care:** Information based on latest Diagnostic and Therapeutic Modalities

Teleconsultation can be done:

- **Between doctors** – when a general practitioner seeks assistance from a specialist, such as a second opinion on the diagnosis, a more indicated medication, or even live guidance when performing a procedure. The patient may or may not be present. This modality is called tele-interconsultation.
- **Between doctor and patient**– directly, without the mediation of another doctor or healthcare professional.

as well as

- **Synchronous** – the interaction is immediate.
- **Asynchronous** – input and output take place at different times and does not allow direct interaction.

Challenges and considerations:

- **Regulation and legal frameworks:** Clear and consistent regulations regarding data privacy, security, and licensing requirements are necessary across Europe.
- **Reimbursement models:** Establishing appropriate reimbursement models for teleconsultation is crucial for their sustainability and accessibility.
- **Technology and infrastructure:** Ensuring equitable access to reliable technology and infrastructure across Europe is essential for inclusive implementation.
- **Dentist training and competency:** Dentists must be adequately trained and equipped to provide effective and safe teleconsultation.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Addressing potential disparities in access to technology and digital literacy to ensure equitable access to tele dentistry for all.

Legal and regulatory framework:

- **Health policy compliance:** Teleconsultation must align with European health policies and directives, particularly on eHealth and cross-border healthcare.
- **Data protection:** Address compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation for handling patient data, ensure privacy and security measures are in place, and maintain adequate cyber security measures.
- **Licensing and professional standards:** Dentists must be licensed according to local law to practice teleconsultations as an integral part of dentistry and ensure they meet professional standards, duties, and regulations. Eventual cross-border teleconsultation must respect local rules on both sides.

Ethical considerations:

- **Patient consent:** Emphasize the importance of informed consent, ensuring patients understand the nature and limitations of teleconsultations.

- **Quality of care:** Ensure that teleconsultation does not compromise the quality of dental care and adheres to established clinical guidelines and standards.

Technical requirements and infrastructure:

- **Technology standards:** Specify the technical standards and requirements for teleconsultations, including interoperability, security, and usability.
- **Access and equity:** Address measures to ensure equitable access to teleconsultation, including for patients with limited digital literacy.

Implementation Strategy:

- **Pilot programs:** Propose initiating pilot programs to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and patient satisfaction of teleconsultation in various European regions.
- **Training and education:** Highlight the need for training programs for dental professionals and awareness campaigns for patients.

Evaluation and monitoring (for local responsible authorities):

- **Performance metrics:** Define metrics for evaluating the success of teleconsultation initiatives, including patient outcomes, access improvements, and cost-effectiveness.
- **Regulatory oversight:** Outline a framework for ongoing regulatory oversight and quality assurance of teleconsultation.