

Notice to amend Telemedicine Guidelines during COVID-19 – dated 3 April 2020

On 26 March 2020, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) published guidance to practitioners on the application of the Telemedicine Guidelines; as contained in **Booklet 10 of the Guidelines for Good Practice in the Healthcare Professions** to assist with the disruption of the transmission of the virus. During his address to the nation on 30 March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced that government will be rolling out a screening, testing and medical management programme on a huge scale. Around 10 000 field workers will be visiting homes in villages, towns and cities to screen residents for **COVID-19** symptoms.

People with symptoms will be referred to local clinics or mobile clinics for testing and those who are infected with coronavirus, with no symptoms or moderate symptoms, will be remaining in isolation at home or at a facility provided by the government, whereas those with severe symptoms will be transferred to hospitals.

In view of the above and after consultation with the twelve(12) Professional Boards under the ambit of the HPCSA the following provisions are hereby amended:

1. Clause (b) of the Guidance on the Application of Telemedicine Guidelines During the COVID-19 Pandemic which stated:

“Telehealth is only permissible in circumstances where there is an already established practitioner-patient relationship, except where Telepsychology and/or Telepsychiatry is involved, in which case telehealth is permissible even without an established practitioner-patient relationship.”

Is hereby amended as follows:

Telehealth should preferably be practised in circumstances where there is an already established practitioner-patient relationship. Where such a relationship does not exist, practitioners may still

consult using Telehealth provided that such consultations are done in the best clinical interest of patients.

2. Clause (c) which stated:

“Practitioners may charge a fee for services rendered through a telehealth platform.”

Is hereby amended as follows:

Although practitioners may charge fees for consultations undertaken through Telehealth platforms, the Council strongly cautions against practices that may amount to over-servicing, perverse incentives and supersession.

Practitioners are reminded that the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Health Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act are still applicable during the practice of Telehealth; that **this guidance is only applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic** and that the HPCSA shall inform practitioners of when this guidance will cease to apply.
