

Virginia Board of Medicine

Telemedicine

***NOTE: DOES NOT REFLECT RECENT
FEDERAL GUIDANCE ON HIPAA COMPLIANCE*
(See link on BOM website for current federal guidance)**

Section One: Preamble.

The Virginia Board of Medicine ("Board") recognizes that using telemedicine services in the delivery of medical services offers potential benefits in the provision of medical care. The appropriate application of these services can enhance medical care by facilitating communication between practitioners, other health care providers, and their patients, prescribing medication, medication management, obtaining laboratory results, scheduling appointments, monitoring chronic conditions, providing health care information, and clarifying medical advice. With the exception of prescribing controlled substances, the Virginia General Assembly has not established statutory parameters regarding the provision and delivery of telemedicine services. Therefore, practitioners must apply existing laws and regulations to the provision of telemedicine services. The Board issues this guidance document to assist practitioners with the application of current laws to telemedicine service practices.

These guidelines should not be construed to alter the scope of practice of any health care provider or authorize the delivery of health care services in a setting, or in a manner, not authorized by law. In fact, these guidelines support a consistent standard of care and scope of practice notwithstanding the delivery tool or business method used to enable practitioner-to-patient communications. For the purpose of prescribing controlled substances, a practitioner using telemedicine services in the provision of medical services to a patient (whether existing or new) must take appropriate steps to establish the practitioner-patient relationship as defined in Virginia Code § 54.1-3303. A practitioner should conduct all appropriate evaluations and history of the patient consistent with traditional standards of care for the particular patient presentation. As such, some situations and patient presentations are appropriate for the utilization of telemedicine services as a component of, or in lieu of, in-person provision of medical care, while others are not. The practitioner is responsible for making this determination, and in doing so must adhere to applicable laws and standards of care.

The Board has developed these guidelines to educate licensees as to the appropriate use of telemedicine services in the practice of medicine. The Board is committed to ensuring patient access to the convenience and benefits afforded by telemedicine services, while promoting the responsible provision of health care services.

It is the expectation of the Board that practitioners who provide medical care, electronically or otherwise, maintain the highest degree of professionalism and should:

- Place the welfare of patients first;

- Maintain acceptable and appropriate standards of practice;
- Adhere to recognized ethical codes governing the applicable profession;
- Adhere to applicable laws and regulations;
- In the case of physicians, properly supervise non-physician clinicians when required to do so by statute; and
- Protect patient confidentiality.

Section Two: Establishing the Practitioner-Patient Relationship.

The practitioner-patient relationship is fundamental to the provision of acceptable medical care. It is the expectation of the Board that practitioners recognize the obligations, responsibilities, and patient rights associated with establishing and maintaining a practitioner-patient relationship.

Where an existing practitioner-patient relationship is not present,¹ a practitioner must take appropriate steps to establish a practitioner-patient relationship consistent with the guidelines identified in this document, with Virginia law, and with any other applicable law.² While each circumstance is unique, such practitioner-patient relationships may be established using telemedicine services provided the standard of care is met.

A practitioner is discouraged from rendering medical advice and/or care using telemedicine services without (1) fully verifying and authenticating the location and, to the extent possible, confirming the identity of the requesting patient; (2) disclosing and validating the practitioner's identity and applicable credential(s); and (3) obtaining appropriate consents from requesting patients after disclosures regarding the delivery models and treatment methods or limitations, including any special informed consents regarding the use of telemedicine services. An appropriate practitioner-patient relationship has not been established when the identity of the practitioner may be unknown to the patient.

Section Three: Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Telemedicine Services.

The Board has adopted the following guidelines for practitioners utilizing telemedicine services in the delivery of patient care, regardless of an existing practitioner-patient relationship prior to an encounter.

Licensure:

The practice of medicine occurs where the patient is located at the time telemedicine services are used, and insurers may issue reimbursements based on where the practitioner is located. Therefore, a practitioner must be licensed by, or under the jurisdiction of, the regulatory board of the state where the patient is located and the state where the practitioner is located. Practitioners who treat or prescribe through online service sites must possess appropriate licensure in all jurisdictions where patients receive care. To ensure appropriate insurance coverage, practitioners must make certain that they are compliant with federal and state laws and policies regarding reimbursements.

¹ This guidance document is not intended to address existing patient-practitioner relationships established through in-person visits.

² The practitioner must adhere not only to Virginia law defining a practitioner-patient relationship, but the law in any state where a patient is receiving services that defines the practitioner-patient relationship.

Evaluation and Treatment of the Patient:

A documented medical evaluation and collection of relevant clinical history commensurate with the presentation of the patient to establish diagnoses and identify underlying conditions and/or contra-indications to the treatment recommended/provided must be obtained prior to providing treatment, which treatment includes the issuance of prescriptions, electronically or otherwise. Treatment and consultation recommendations made in an online setting, including issuing a prescription via electronic means, will be held to the same standards of appropriate practice as those in traditional, in-person encounters. Treatment, including issuing a prescription based solely on an online questionnaire, does not constitute an acceptable standard of care.

Informed Consent:

Evidence documenting appropriate patient informed consent for the use of telemedicine services must be obtained and maintained. Appropriate informed consent should, as a baseline, include the following:

- Identification of the patient, the practitioner, and the practitioner's credentials;
- Types of activities permitted using telemedicine services (e.g. prescription refills, appointment scheduling, patient education, etc.);
- Agreement by the patient that it is the role of the practitioner to determine whether or not the condition being diagnosed and/or treated is appropriate for a telemedicine encounter;
- Details on security measures taken with the use of telemedicine services, such as encrypting date of service, password protected screen savers, encrypting data files, or utilizing other reliable authentication techniques, as well as potential risks to privacy notwithstanding such measures;
- Hold harmless clause for information lost due to technical failures; and
- Requirement for express patient consent to forward patient-identifiable information to a third party.

Medical Records:

The medical record should include, if applicable, copies of all patient-related electronic communications, including patient-practitioner communication, prescriptions, laboratory and test results, evaluations and consultations, records of past care, and instructions obtained or produced in connection with the utilization of telemedicine services. Informed consents obtained in connection with an encounter involving telemedicine services should also be filed in the medical record. The patient record established during the use of telemedicine services must be accessible to both the practitioner and the patient, and consistent with all established laws and regulations governing patient healthcare records.

Privacy and Security of Patient Records and Exchange of Information:

Written policies and procedures should be maintained for documentation, maintenance, and transmission of the records of encounters using telemedicine services. Such policies and procedures should address (1) privacy, (2) health-care personnel (in addition to the practitioner

addressee) who will process messages, (3) hours of operation, (4) types of transactions that will be permitted electronically, (5) required patient information to be included in the communication, such as patient name, identification number and type of transaction, (6) archival and retrieval, and (7) quality oversight mechanisms. Policies and procedures should be periodically evaluated for currency and be maintained in an accessible and readily available manner for review.

Section Four: Prescribing:

Prescribing controlled substances requires the establishment of a bona fide practitioner-patient relationship in accordance with § 54.1-3303 (A) of the Code of Virginia. Prescribing controlled substances, in-person or via telemedicine services, is at the professional discretion of the prescribing practitioner. The indication, appropriateness, and safety considerations for each prescription provided via telemedicine services must be evaluated by the practitioner in accordance with applicable law and current standards of practice and consequently carries the same professional accountability as prescriptions delivered during an in-person encounter. Where such measures are upheld, and the appropriate clinical consideration is carried out and documented, the practitioner may exercise their judgment and prescribe controlled substances as part of telemedicine encounters in accordance with applicable state and federal law.

Prescriptions must comply with the requirements set out in Virginia Code §§ 54.1-3408.01 and 54.1-3303(A). Prescribing controlled substances in Schedule II through V via telemedicine also requires compliance with federal rules for the practice of telemedicine. Practitioners issuing prescriptions as part of telemedicine services should include direct contact for the prescriber or the prescriber's agent on the prescription. This direct contact information ensures ease of access by pharmacists to clarify prescription orders, and further facilitates the prescriber-patient-pharmacist relationship.

For the purpose of prescribing Schedule VI controlled substances, "telemedicine services" is defined as it is in § 38.2-3418.16 of the Code of Virginia. Under that definition, "telemedicine services," as it pertains to the delivery of health care services, means the use of electronic technology or media, including interactive audio or video, for the purpose of diagnosing or treating a patient or consulting with other health care providers regarding a patient's diagnosis or treatment. "Telemedicine services" does not include an audio-only telephone, electronic mail message, facsimile transmission, or online questionnaire.

Section Five: Guidance Document Limitations.

Nothing in this document shall be construed to limit the authority of the Board to investigate, discipline, or regulate its licensees pursuant to applicable Virginia statutes and regulations. Additionally, nothing in this document shall be construed to limit the Board's ability to review the delivery or use of telemedicine services by its licensees for adherence to the standard of care and compliance with the requirements set forth in the laws and regulations of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Furthermore, this document does not limit the Board's ability to determine that certain situations fail to meet the standard of care or standards set forth in laws and regulations despite technical adherence to the guidance produced herein.

Statutory references:**§ 54.1-3303. Prescriptions to be issued and drugs to be dispensed for medical or therapeutic purposes only.**

A. A prescription for a controlled substance may be issued only by a practitioner of medicine, osteopathy, podiatry, dentistry or veterinary medicine who is authorized to prescribe controlled substances, or by a licensed nurse practitioner pursuant to § 54.1-2957.01, a licensed physician assistant pursuant to § 54.1-2952.1, or a TPA-certified optometrist pursuant to Article 5 (§ 54.1-3222 et seq.) of Chapter 32.

B. A prescription shall be issued only to persons or animals with whom the practitioner has a bona fide practitioner-patient relationship or veterinarian-client-patient relationship.

A bona fide practitioner-patient relationship shall exist if the practitioner has (i) obtained or caused to be obtained a medical or drug history of the patient; (ii) provided information to the patient about the benefits and risks of the drug being prescribed; (iii) performed or caused to be performed an appropriate examination of the patient, either physically or by the use of instrumentation and diagnostic equipment through which images and medical records may be transmitted electronically; and (iv) initiated additional interventions and follow-up care, if necessary, especially if a prescribed drug may have serious side effects. Except in cases involving a medical emergency, the examination required pursuant to clause (iii) shall be performed by the practitioner prescribing the controlled substance, a practitioner who practices in the same group as the practitioner prescribing the controlled substance, or a consulting practitioner. In cases in which the practitioner is an employee of the Department of Health and is providing expedited partner therapy consistent with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the examination required by clause (iii) shall not be required.

A practitioner who has established a bona fide practitioner-patient relationship with a patient in accordance with the provisions of this subsection may prescribe Schedule II through VI controlled substances to that patient, provided that, in cases in which the practitioner has performed the examination required pursuant to clause (iii) by use of instrumentation and diagnostic equipment through which images and medical records may be transmitted electronically, the prescribing of such Schedule II through V controlled substance is in compliance with federal requirements for the practice of telemedicine.

For the purpose of prescribing a Schedule VI controlled substance to a patient via telemedicine services as defined in § 38.2-3418.16, a prescriber may establish a bona fide practitioner-patient relationship by an examination through face-to-face interactive, two-way, real-time communications services or store-and-forward technologies³ when all of the following conditions are met: (a) the patient has provided a medical history that is available for review by the prescriber; (b) the prescriber obtains an updated medical history at the time of prescribing; (c) the prescriber makes a diagnosis at the time of prescribing;

³ Although the term "store-and-forward technologies" is not defined by statute, it is defined by regulation of the Virginia Department of Health for the purpose of Medicare and Medicaid covered services, as: "'store and forward' means when prerecorded images, such as x-rays, video clips, and photographs are captured and then forwarded to and retrieved, viewed, and assessed by a provider at a later time. Some common applications include (i) teledermatology, where digital pictures of a skin problem are transmitted and assessed by a dermatologist; (ii) teleradiology, where x-ray images are sent to and read by a radiologist; and (iii) teleretinal imaging, where images are sent to and evaluated by an ophthalmologist to assess for diabetic retinopathy." 12 VAC 30-121-70(7)(a).

(d) the prescriber conforms to the standard of care expected of in-person care as appropriate to the patient's age and presenting condition, including when the standard of care requires the use of diagnostic testing and performance of a physical examination, which may be carried out through the use of peripheral devices appropriate to the patient's condition; (e) the prescriber is actively licensed in the Commonwealth and authorized to prescribe; (f) if the patient is a member or enrollee of a health plan or carrier, the prescriber has been credentialed by the health plan or carrier as a participating provider and the diagnosing and prescribing meets the qualifications for reimbursement by the health plan or carrier pursuant to § [38.2-3418.16](#); and (g) upon request, the prescriber provides patient records in a timely manner in accordance with the provisions of § [32.1-127.1:03](#) and all other state and federal laws and regulations. Nothing in this paragraph shall permit a prescriber to establish a bona fide practitioner-patient relationship for the purpose of prescribing a Schedule VI controlled substance when the standard of care dictates that an in-person physical examination is necessary for diagnosis. Nothing in this paragraph shall apply to: (1) a prescriber providing on-call coverage per an agreement with another prescriber or his prescriber's professional entity or employer; (2) a prescriber consulting with another prescriber regarding a patient's care; or (3) orders of prescribers for hospital out-patients or in-patients.

Any practitioner who prescribes any controlled substance with the knowledge that the controlled substance will be used otherwise than medicinally or for therapeutic purposes shall be subject to the criminal penalties provided in § [18.2-248](#) for violations of the provisions of law relating to the distribution or possession of controlled substances.

§ 54.1-3408.01. Requirements for prescriptions.

A. The written prescription referred to in § 54.1-3408 shall be written with ink or individually typed or printed. The prescription shall contain the name, address, and telephone number of the prescriber. A prescription for a controlled substance other than one controlled in Schedule VI shall also contain the federal controlled substances registration number assigned to the prescriber. The prescriber's information shall be either preprinted upon the prescription blank, electronically printed, typewritten, rubber stamped, or printed by hand.

The written prescription shall contain the first and last name of the patient for whom the drug is prescribed. The address of the patient shall either be placed upon the written prescription by the prescriber or his agent, or by the dispenser of the prescription. If not otherwise prohibited by law, the dispenser may record the address of the patient in an electronic prescription dispensing record for that patient in lieu of recording it on the prescription. Each written prescription shall be dated as of, and signed by the prescriber on, the day when issued. The prescription may be prepared by an agent for the prescriber's signature.

This section shall not prohibit a prescriber from using preprinted prescriptions for drugs classified in Schedule VI if all requirements concerning dates, signatures, and other information specified above are otherwise fulfilled.

No written prescription order form shall include more than one prescription. However, this provision shall not apply (i) to prescriptions written as chart orders for patients in hospitals and long-term-care facilities, patients receiving home infusion services or hospice patients, or (ii) to a prescription ordered through a pharmacy operated by or for the Department of Corrections or the Department of Juvenile Justice, the central pharmacy of the Department of Health, or the central outpatient pharmacy operated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; or (iii) to prescriptions written for patients residing in adult and juvenile detention centers, local or regional jails, or work release centers operated by the Department of Corrections.

B. Prescribers' orders, whether written as chart orders or prescriptions, for Schedules II, III, IV, and V controlled drugs to be administered to (i) patients or residents of long-term care facilities served by a Virginia pharmacy from a remote location or (ii) patients receiving parenteral, intravenous, intramuscular, subcutaneous or intraspinal infusion therapy and served by a home infusion pharmacy from a remote location, may be transmitted to that remote pharmacy by an electronic communications device over telephone lines which send the exact image to the receiver in hard copy form, and such facsimile copy shall be treated as a valid original prescription order. If the order is for a radiopharmaceutical, a physician authorized by state or federal law to possess and administer medical radioactive materials may authorize a nuclear medicine technologist to transmit a prescriber's verbal or written orders for radiopharmaceuticals.

C. The oral prescription referred to in § 54.1-3408 shall be transmitted to the pharmacy of the patient's choice by the prescriber or his authorized agent. For the purposes of this section, an authorized agent of the prescriber shall be an employee of the prescriber who is under his immediate and personal supervision, or if not an employee, an individual who holds a valid license allowing the administration or dispensing of drugs and who is specifically directed by the prescriber.