

Virginia Board of Dentistry

Teledentistry

Section One: Preamble.

The Virginia Board of Dentistry ("Board") recognizes that using teledentistry services in the delivery of dental services offers potential benefits in the provision of dental care. The appropriate application of these services can enhance dental 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 dental advice. The Virginia General Assembly has not established statutory parameters regarding the provision and delivery of teledental services. Therefore, practitioners must apply existing laws and regulations to the provision of teledentistry services. The Board issues this guidance document to assist practitioners with the application of current laws to teledentistry 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 clarity, a practitioner using teledentistry services in the provision of dental 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 and 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 teledentistry services as a component of, or in lieu of, in-person provision of dental 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 teledentistry services in the practice of dentistry. The Board is committed to ensuring patient access to the convenience and benefits afforded by teledentistry services, while promoting the responsible provision of health care services.

It is the expectation of the Board that practitioners who provide dental 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 dentists, properly supervise non-dentist clinicians when required to do so by statute; and
- Protect patient confidentiality.

Section Two: Definitions.

For the purpose of these guidelines, the Board defines “teledentistry services” consistent with the definition of “telemedicine services” in § 38.2-3418.16 of the Code of Virginia. “Teledentistry services,” as it pertains to the delivery of dental 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. “Teledentistry services” does not include an audio-only telephone, electronic mail message, facsimile transmission, or online questionnaire.

Section Three: Establishing the Practitioner-Patient Relationship.

The practitioner-patient relationship is fundamental to the provision of acceptable dental 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.

Specifically, Virginia Code § 54.1-3303(A) provides the requirements to establish a practitioner-patient relationship. *See* Va. Code § 54.1-3303(A).

A practitioner is discouraged from rendering dental advice and/or care using teledentistry 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 teledental services. An appropriate practitioner-patient relationship has not been established when the identity of the practitioner may be unknown to the patient.

Section Four: Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Teledentistry Services.

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

Licensure:

The practice of dentistry occurs where the patient is located at the time teledentistry 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

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.

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.

Evaluation and Treatment of the Patient:

A documented dental evaluation and collection of relevant clinical history commensurate with the presentation of the patient to establish diagnoses and identify underlying conditions and/or contraindications 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 teledentistry 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 teledentistry 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 teledentistry encounter;
- Details on security measures taken with the use of teledentistry 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.

Dental Records:

The dental 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 teledentistry services. Informed consents obtained in connection with an encounter involving teledentistry services should also be filed in the dental record. The patient record established during the use of teledentistry 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 teledentistry 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.

Prescribing:

Prescribing medications, in-person or via teledentistry services, is at the professional discretion of the prescribing practitioner. The indication, appropriateness, and safety considerations for each prescription provided via teledentistry 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 medications as part of teledentistry 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). Additionally, practitioners issuing prescriptions as part of teledentistry 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.

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 teledentistry 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.