In view of the current situation regarding COVID-19 disease and its impending community transmission in India and as per the Telemedicine Practice Guidelines issued by BOARD OF GOVERNORS in supersession of the Medical Council of India dated 25th March 2020, AIOS have drafted the Advisory for the Tele-medicine practice in Ophthalmology.

We know all of you are working tirelessly and showing selfless courage in the face of risk. We acknowledge with gratitude the courage and the efforts of all those providing eye care on the front lines during these unprecedented times.

# LET US STAND TOGETHER AND FIGHT CORONA #

Enabling Registered Medical Practitioners to Provide Healthcare Using Telemedicine
The professional judgment of Ophthalmologists should be the guiding principle for all telemedicine consultations: An Ophthalmologist is well-positioned to decide whether a technology-based consultation is sufficient or an in-person review is needed.

1. Practitioner shall exercise proper discretion and not compromise on the quality of care. They should be reasonably comfortable that telemedicine is in the patient's interest after taking a holistic view of the given situation.

2. Telemedicine consultation is should **not be anonymous**: both patient and the Consultant need to know each other’s identity.

3. The consultant should **verify and confirm the patient's identity** by name, age, address, email ID, phone number, registered ID or any other identification as may be deemed to be appropriate. He/she should ensure that there is a mechanism for a patient to verify the credentials and contact details of the consultant.

4. For issuing a prescription, the consultant needs to explicitly ask the age of the patient, and if there is any doubt, seek age proof. Where the patient is a minor, after confirming the age, teleconsultation would be allowed only if the minor is consulting along-with an adult whose identity needs to be ascertained.

5. The consultant should begin the consultation by informing the patient about his/her name and qualifications.

6. Primarily there are 3 modes of communication: Video, Audio or Text (chat, images, messaging, email, fax etc.).

7. **Patient consent** is necessary for any telemedicine consultation. The consent can be Implied or explicit depending on the following situations:
   - **If, the patient initiates the telemedicine consultation, then the consent is implied.** For most of the teleconsultations the consent can be assumed to be implied because the patient has initiated the consultation.
   - **An Explicit patient consent is needed if:**
     - A Health worker, RMP or a Caregiver initiates a Telemedicine consultation.
     - Explicit consent can be recorded in any form. Patient can send an email, text or audio/video message. Patient can state his/her intent on phone/video to the consultant (e.g. “Yes, I consent to avail consultation via telemedicine” or any such communication in simple words).
     - The consultant must record this in his patient records.

8. The consultant must make all efforts to gather sufficient medical information about the patient's condition before making any professional judgment.

9. If the condition can be appropriately managed via telemedicine, based on the type of consultation, then the consultant may proceed with a professional judgment to:
   - Provide Health Education as appropriate in the case; and/or
10. **Prescribing medications, via telemedicine consultation is at the professional discretion of the consultant. It entails the same professional accountability as in the traditional in-person consult.** If a medical condition requires a particular protocol to diagnose and prescribe as in a case of in-person consult then same prevailing principle will be applicable to a telemedicine consult.

11. The consultant may prescribe medicines via telemedicine ONLY when he/she is satisfied that he/ she has gathered adequate and relevant information about the patient's medical condition and prescribed medicines are in the best interest of the patient. Prescribing Medicines without an appropriate diagnosis/provisional diagnosis will amount to a professional misconduct.

12. If the consultant has prescribed medicines, he/she shall issue a prescription as per the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations and shall not contravene the provisions of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and Rules.

- Consultant shall provide the photo, scan, a digital copy of a signed prescription or e-Prescription to the patient via email or any messaging platform
- In case the consultant is transmitting the prescription directly to a pharmacy, he/ she must ensure explicit consent of the patient that entitles him/her to get the medicines dispensed from any pharmacy of his/ her choice

13. Principles of medical ethics, including professional norms for protecting patient privacy and confidentiality as per IMC Act, shall be binding and must be upheld and practised.

14. Registered Medical Practitioner would be required to fully abide by Indian Medical Council (Professional conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002 and with the relevant provisions of the IT Act, Data protection and privacy laws or any applicable rules notified from time to time for protecting patient privacy and confidentiality and regarding the handling and transfer of such personal information regarding the patient. This shall be binding and must be upheld and practised.

15. An Ophthalmologists will not be held responsible for breach of confidentiality if there is reasonable evidence to believe that the patient's privacy and confidentiality has been compromised by a technology breach or by a person other than the consultant. The consultant should ensure that a reasonable degree of care undertaken during hiring such services.

16. **Emergency Situations:** In all telemedicine consultations, as per the judgment of the consultant if it is an emergency situation, the goal and objective should be to provide in-person care at the soonest. **However critical steps could be life-saving and guidance and counseling could be critical.** For example, in cases involving trauma, right advice and guidance around maintaining the neck position might protect the spine in some cases. The guidelines are designed to provide a balanced approach in such conditions. The consultant based on his/ her professional discretion may...
Advise first aid
Counselling
Facilitate referral

In all cases of emergency, the patient MUST be advised for an in-person interaction with a Registered Medical Practitioner at the earliest.

17. **Local Ophthalmological drops such as: Ciprofloxacin for Conjunctivitis, etc can be prescribed during the first consult which is a video consultation and are being re-prescribed for re-fill, in case of follow-up.**

Reference: Telemedicine Practice Guidelines by BOARD OF GOVERNORS In supersession of the Medical Council of India constitutes, Appendix 5 of the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics Regulation, 2002)