



**The Impact of COVID-19 and Telehealth on Patients**  
from the Patient Engagement Interest Group

# The patient viewpoint...

*As we are transitioning to the virtual world in terms of healthcare, how do you think we can best support patients moving forward in a virtual aspect?*

*So what are the possible solutions and how can Pharma help?*

“ *I’m very aware that many people are incredibly anxious at this time...and that people come from many diverse backgrounds* ”

*Some people live in multicultural families, multigenerational families, English isn’t their first language. Some have mental health problems, other disabilities, dementia, and being able to grasp the whole issue of the virtual world is something that is going to add to their anxiety*

**Sue Allen, patient**

# Support for moving into the virtual telehealth world



Important for HCPs to **identify** those who are going to struggle



Provide **additional support and guidance** for a **telehealth consultation** – always check if a telephone or video call is possible

But don't make assumptions based on age / gender / background / illness / disability...



Offer **alternatives** to those who are struggling with a telephone or virtual consultation or **ask for a relative or carer** to be involved



Nominate a **single point of contact** / key worker where possible

But as a minimum healthcare providers need to devise a system where the optimal means of communication is recorded and is visible to all, especially for pharmacies and surgeries



Use **simple communication** formats such as surgery SMS messaging and letters to explain the appointment / consultation process

Its important that patients understand that medical emergencies, such as chest pain, unexplained pain, shortness of breath etc will still be seen as a matter of priority or to call 999

# Who may find it more challenging to access telehealth?



**Nearly a million** living with dementia in the UK



**25 per cent** of individuals in families with at least one disabled member live in income poverty, compared to 16 per cent of individuals in households with no disabled member

This may impact their access to smartphones, internet and / or computers



**1 in 5** with a hearing loss >25 decibels – that's 12 million people

**1.2 million** with a hearing loss greater than 65 decibels



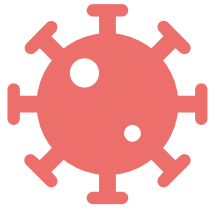
The Office of National Statistics report that people who couldn't speak English "well" or "at all" had a **lower proportion of "good" general health** than those with English as their main language...



**1 in 6 adults** in England have literacy levels equivalent to ages 5-7

...and this is not an exhaustive list...so inclusivity remains a key objective when devising telehealth solutions and patient involvement is critical

# Opportunities for additional support



Provide patient appropriate materials for common diseases and chronic conditions, explaining how they may be impacted by COVID-19

*e.g. autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's or multiple sclerosis*



Develop materials in different languages and in various formats e.g. basic infographic (average reader age 12 years or SATS level 4 / Key Stage 2), and for the 'expert' patient



Use real words that patients with the condition would use, not words that you think they would use



Display information and contact details in pharmacies and surgery waiting rooms in COVID-safe formats so that patients can request / be sent a copy

Facilitate delivery in various formats including:



Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, printed materials, SMS, Email, surgery website



Work with patient groups to devise a check list / feedback form about a patient's access to smartphones / computers etc and whether they can be contacted by phone or virtual calls. Share this form with the healthcare team and local pharmacy

# Our top five tips for improving health literacy



**INVOLVE PATIENTS** from start to finish. Involve those who are the intended end users of materials to ensure accessibility and relevance

1



**KEEP IT SHORT** and consider using a variety of channels for your information. Think about incorporating bullet points, using plenty of white space around text and including images/icons vs text where possible. Video can be a very powerful tool

2



**MAKE IT EASY TO NAVIGATE** so that the reader can quickly find the information they need. Internal hyperlinks, chapter dividers and outbound links can be a great way to do this

3



**MAKE IT READABLE** because 1 in 6 adults in England have literacy levels equivalent to ages 5-7. Ensure the language and tone you use is simple and is accessible to people who do not have a scientific background

4



**INCLUDE A CALL TO ACTION** or direct the reader to further information

5

# Top tips for developing a patient information leaflet



Work with patients to determine need, focus and content



Use simple visuals and clear icons – sometimes it helps to show how something works

*e.g. the heart*, before you explain what is going wrong



Use a large font size – ideally 12 point – with good contrast – this will help the visually impaired



Keep content easy to read, with appropriate language and following literacy / numeracy guidelines (age 12 or below)



Never use all capitals in a title or in text – people with dyslexia find this especially difficult to read



Develop two patient leaflets wherever possible, for the less expert, and the expert patient



Assume nothing – many people don't have a GCSE pass in double science, so their knowledge of how their bodies work or where organs are positioned may be limited



Where possible limit sentence length to 15 words or fewer and avoid conjunctions



A glossary can help but use common words to help pronunciation  
*e.g. pro-nun-see-a-shun*



Unit 1 City Business Centre  
6 Brighton Road  
Horsham  
West Sussex  
RH13 5BB

Tel: 01403 264898

[pmsociety.org.uk](http://pmsociety.org.uk)