

AMT online consultation guidelines for Massage Therapists

*Your massage therapist
misses YOU.*

*They probably
don't miss the laundry.*

Background

Massage therapists are unable to socially distance from their clients during a standard consultation and are at high risk of becoming vectors for transmission of COVID19.

On 16 March 2020 the Association of Massage Therapists advised its 3000 plus practitioner members to shut down for two weeks to help contain the spread of COVID19. On 24 March 2020, by order of the Australian Department of Health, massage therapy services across Australia were included in the shut down measures announced by the Prime Minister, effective from midnight on 25 March 2020.

During this COVID19 period of enforced shutdown for massage therapy, AMT supports and recognises that members may choose to offer online consultations to their existing clients. AMT acknowledges the importance of maintaining therapeutic relationships with clients and a stable sense of professional identity.

AMT further acknowledges the disruption that COVID19 poses in terms of the management of chronic pain conditions in community health settings. There is evidence in several systematic reviews of small to moderate reductions in pain, disability and distress in telephone/internet consultation groups compared to any controls (active, standard care or waitlist control).

As a biopsychosocial form of care, there is demonstrably more that massage therapists provide than just hands-on therapy. These non-hands-on dimensions of care can be leveraged in an online consultation.

This document serves as a guideline for the implementation of online consultations, along with the AMT Code of Practice, Code of Ethics and AMT Vision Statement. Members will need to check with their insurer prior to commencing online consultations to ensure that they hold appropriate cover.

Fenton Green has confirmed that policyholders are covered for online consultation. There is further information on this on page 5 of this document.

Definition:

Online consultations by massage therapists refer to a service provided by a qualified massage therapist using a digital platform (see below for some options), to facilitate a virtual interaction with the client. The sessions are led by the therapist and may include but are not limited to:

- client health screening and questionnaires
- visual physical assessment
- active listening, reassurance and advice
- self-massage techniques
- at home exercises and recommendations.

These should be tailored to the client's individual health needs and goals, based on their unique health history and presenting condition.

Online consultations can only be offered to existing clients. Consultations with new clients need to be suspended during the COVID19 shutdown.

Whilst there are inherent differences between online and face-to-face massage therapy consultations, every therapist must carefully consider their duty of care to clients and abide by the AMT Code of Practice.

Online consultation by massage therapists versus “telehealth”

Massage therapists can provide online consultations not telehealth.

The Australian Government is expanding Medicare-subsidised telehealth services for all Australians and providing extra incentives to general practitioners and other health practitioners to ensure continued access to essential primary health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Telehealth will include GP consultations and some services provided by other medical specialists, nurse practitioners, mental health treatment, chronic disease management, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments, services to people with eating disorders, pregnancy support counselling, services to patients in aged care facilities, children with autism, and after-hours consultations.

Massage therapy is **not** one of the abovementioned services and is not Medicare subsidised. However, this does not preclude massage therapists from providing an online service.

AMT encourages members to refer to the service generically as “online consultation” rather than telehealth.

What can I provide?

Members are required to adhere to AMT’s Code of Ethics and Code of Practice, and be guided by AMT’s vision statement:

“Australians have access to safe, ethical and evidence-informed massage therapy treatment within the Australian health care system.”

Each therapist must consider their strengths, weaknesses and experience as a therapist, and their qualifications and scope of practice. Therapists must also refer to their own insurance policies and ensure that any advice and recommendations are made in line with their insurance coverage. If you are not covered for a particular approach in your policy, such as corrective exercise, then you will not be covered to provide it via an online consultation either.

The following list is not exhaustive or prescriptive but consultations may include:

- self-massage techniques
- stretching techniques
- corrective exercises
- postural observation
- Breathing and relaxation techniques.

Fees and health fund rebates

All members should consider a fee schedule for this service that is representative of the time, commitment and preparation involved in its delivery.

The client will not be able to claim a rebate for this service through their private health insurance provider. Do not issue a health fund receipt.

Record keeping

Therapists must adhere to all record keeping guidelines that apply with a traditional face-to-face massage therapy treatment.

Patient-reported measurement tools can substitute for some of the information you would otherwise gain through in-person, face-to-face questioning. There is a list of online patient reported outcome tools here that you can use to monitor and evaluate your client's progress through online consultations:

<https://www.pirlresearch.com/online-outcome-measure>

Information security and privacy considerations

If you are conducting sessions from your home, you must protect your client's privacy as you would in a clinic. Be aware of:

- security of the videoconferencing interface (software and hardware)
- security of patient information
- storage of any video recordings and still images
- visual and auditory privacy of the room you are working from

Additional information on privacy

Australian Privacy Principles

www.oaic.gov.au/privacy-law/privacy-act/australian-privacy-principles

Guide to securing personal information

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/guidance-and-advice/guide-to-securing-personal-information/>

Policies, procedures and risk management

Before conducting online consultations, members are required to develop practice policies, procedures and risk management protocols for:

- management and security of patient health information as it relates to video consultations
- documentation of each video consultation.

Professional indemnity

Every insurance policy is different so you will need to check with your insurer to ascertain whether your policy covers you for the provision of online consultations.

Fenton Green has confirmed that AMT members are able to offer their services via online consultation. This insurance coverage is subject to members operating in accordance with AMT guidelines and standards. Any modalities you offer via online consultation, such as movement and exercise prescription or yoga, must be listed on your policy and you must have relevant qualifications. This could be in the form of a nationally recognised unit of competence, qualification or substantial formal professional development.

Fenton Green's coverage only extends to online consultations with existing clients. Consultations with new clients need to be suspended during the COVID19 shutdown.

Coverage for international consultations does not extend to the USA or Canada.

Providing care via online consultation

Considerations

To determine if online consultations are appropriate for your practice, you must consider:

- client needs and preferences, and whether you believe you can help sufficiently in this format i.e. clinical effectiveness
- client safety, remembering that your clients do not have your knowledge of anatomy or cautions
- the ability of the client to listen to and follow instructions
- the space available to the client
- the equipment required for both parties (hardware and software).

Decide on the model that will best suit the clinical needs of your practice and clients. You may need to consider having multiple options available to meet your clients' situation.

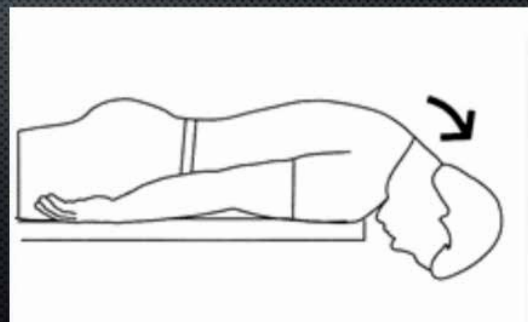
Most clients will be familiar with common audiovisual applications such as Skype or Facetime but they may not have a laptop or a desktop that can be set up in a room with adequate space to move or a distraction free environment.

If you normally use an array of equipment in your clinic that your clients won't have at home, consider what suitable substitutes that most clients would have at home.

When I first moved to the US my wife called me from New Zealand saying her neck was really stiff and sore. I told her to try and lie with her head off the edge of the bed and hang her head. She called four days later to tell me she was doing great and the exercise had really helped.



What I meant



What she did

@retlouping

What facilities will I need?

Set up or obtain access to consultation space that:

- is quiet and fit for purpose
- affords the client privacy
- has plain decor that will not distract from visual images on the screen
- has good lighting, avoiding high-intensity light (eg a window) behind the client who is being viewed
- has systems to prevent interruptions (eg a 'do not disturb' sign to indicate that a video consultation is in progress)
- has a strong stable internet connection
- has access to a phone as a back-up if the video call fails
- hardware and software (you can hold telehealth video consultations using your phone, tablet or desktop computer and appropriate software as discussed below.)

Software

Be very cautious about using the common software options such as Skype or Zoom. In particular, Zoom is not suitable for online consultation because it has been found to have multiple security issues and would not meet requirements under privacy regulations. There are relatively inexpensive options that are specifically built for telehealth in Australia:

<https://www.karenfinnin.com/how-to-choose-a-telehealth-video-platform/>

www.signal.org

Free. Signal is encrypted and considered to be very secure. It may not be as user friendly as the specifically designed telehealth software.

www.cliniko.com

Cliniko has integrated telehealth. Currently free if you already have a Cliniko subscription, although eventually they will charge due to the development costs

www.coviu.com

\$19.95 per month

www.physitrack.com.au

approx \$29 per month

Recording video consultations

The default position is that online consultations are not recorded (in the same way that face-to-face consultations are not recorded). However, instances may arise where it is clinically appropriate to record all or some of a telehealth video consultation, or take and record still images from a consultation in order to properly manage a patient's health needs.

If the recording of a video consultation is proposed for clinical purposes:

- provide the patient with information about how the recordings (including discrete still images) would be managed, stored and accessed
- gain prior written consent from the patient and document this consent in the patient's health record
- confirm a patient's consent for recording verbally on camera at the commencement of the consultation
- store recordings securely in the patient's health record in accordance with usual requirements for retaining health records.

Advise patients that they are not authorised to make their own recordings of a video consultation.

Clinicians should be mindful of their own privacy in relation to the risk of video recordings being redistributed in the public domain without consent.

What if I don't feel ready to do online consultations?

This is a whole new world for all of us. You could write a newsletter to stay in contact with your clients or you could send a personal email to each one, perhaps with a personal suggestion. Or you could see if anyone would like to have a quick chat online or on the phone to see how they are going. If you actually talk with clients, you might be surprised how easily you can translate what you already know to suggestions to help clients get through this time without you. It's not just about "business" – it's also about being a caring voice / face in the midst of chaos.

Further resources

https://journals.lww.com/pain/Citation/publishahead/Managing_patients_with_chronic_pain_during_the.98431.aspx

<https://yomassage.com/blogs/news/how-to-work-virtually-with-your-massage-clients>

<https://www.karenfinnin.com/karen-tv/>

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