

## CEOM: teleconsultation during COVID-19

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The European Council of Medical Orders (CEOM) conducted a survey of national teleconsultation practice in European countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective was to map best practices undertaken to support doctors' vital work while protecting their health

during the COVID-19 response. Twelve countries across Europe responded including: Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

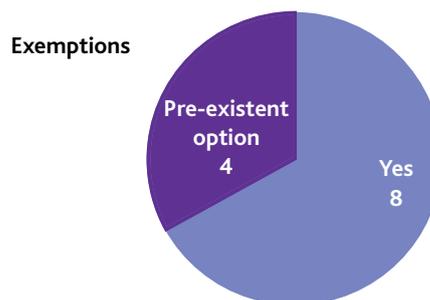
The outcome of the survey shows a shift toward teleconsultation across Europe, however, some differences have been identified particularly when it comes to medical procedures that can or cannot be conducted via teleconsultation and the technology available.

National medical associations that had a wide usage of teleconsultation explained that there was continuity of the usual physical consultations remotely during the pandemic. This is due to the fact that in most of these countries, teleconsultation was already a general practice and digital tools already existed (Germany, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, UK). Most of these associations provided guidance on how to properly conduct remote consultation in line with medical ethics. Some variations might exist where teleconsultation might be coupled with certain conditions depending on the country, for example: the doctor should have already consulted the patient physically (Luxembourg) or teleconsultation should be followed by a physical consultation (Switzerland). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Estonia relaxed rules to allow the first consultation to be done remotely, and not just the follow-up as before the pandemic. In Switzerland for certain medical conditions, a clinical examination could be conducted via teleconsultation and a second appointment, blood test or examination can be requested with the physical presence of the doctor.

National medical associations who authorised limited teleconsultation explain that its use could not be made universal, especially in cases of serious illnesses (Greece,

Portugal, Italy). The use of teleconsultation has been limited to COVID-19 patients, the supply of certificates for sick leave, prescriptions, simple diagnoses and patient monitoring (Cyprus, Italy, Spain). However, teleconsultation has showed its limits, in Spain and Italy teleconsultation was mandatory in cases where COVID-19 infection was suspected in order to protect doctors, however, the move was criticised as it didn't allow for further examination to check the patients' status in regard to COVID-19.

**Have you put in place exemptions on national level for a wider use of teleconsultation following the COVID-19 pandemic?**



Regarding the technology used to conduct teleconsultations, most countries used traditional communications tools and wide-spread applications such as telephone, Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp. In some countries like the Netherlands, Switzerland and Luxembourg, national medical associations supported the use of specialised and secure eHealth applications that were developed in compliance with European regulations including GDPR and national legislation. When it comes to the respect of medical confidentiality, it was widely considered that teleconsultation is a medical procedure and therefore traditional confidentiality obligations apply.

**About CEOM:** The purpose of the CEOM is to promote within the European Union and the European Free Trade Association the practice of high-quality medicine respectful of patients' needs. CEOM brings together the Medical Councils and the independent medical regulatory authorities of European Union member states and the European Free Trade Association responsible for either ethics and professional conduct, registration or licensing procedures, disciplinary matters regarding physicians, recognition of qualifications and levels of specialty, authorisation to practice and setting of professional standards. CEOM is the leading medical organisation in Europe addressing the issue of violence in healthcare settings.

## European competent authorities' pandemic response

In June, the European Network of Medical Competent Authorities (ENMCA) met virtually to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on their work and the regulatory responses taken to combat its impact. The meeting brought together 50 representatives from 25 medical competent authorities across Europe.

The meeting covered issues such as the impact of COVID on registration, revalidation and education & training. A representative from the European Commission presented the EC's guidance on assisting competent authorities through the crisis.