

1.1.2 Telephone and electronic communications

It's not always necessary for patients to visit the practice to get advice or direction from their GP. Practices need to have a policy about how they communicate with patients, including via telephone and/or electronic means, where these are used.

RACGP 4th Edition Standards

- 1.1.2** *Patients of our practice are able to obtain timely advice or information related to their clinical care by telephone and electronic means (where in use) where a GP determines that this is clinically safe and that a face-to-face consultation is unnecessary for that patient.*

Assessment methods

- Interview with GPs and staff

Surveyors will interview the GPs, nurses and administrative staff, who will describe the practice's procedures for receiving and returning telephone calls, and electronic communications, such as fax and email.

- Document review of patient health records

The GP surveyor will look for evidence of telephone and/or electronic communication consultations in a review of current health records.

Meeting the Standards

Practice staff should be able to describe what the telephone and electronic communication policies are, for example, how do they receive calls and, depending on the nature of the call, how do they manage it, transfer it for someone else to receive, or take a message and ensure it is returned in a timely manner? Reception staff will ideally know what each GP prefers are in regards to which calls he or she would like to be interrupted for, and for which calls they would prefer a message be taken.

Where clinically significant, each telephone encounter or email exchange should be noted in the patient's health record as a telephone or email consultation. It's important that all communication or consultation is recorded to ensure continuity of care. This could include other clinical staff, such as practice nurses, giving advice or discussing results with patients.

Best practice

While it is not essential, if practices choose to have an 'on hold' telephone message when putting callers on hold, then it should advise callers to phone 000 in case of an emergency.

The practice's policies and procedures manual will include a documented policy about how the practice communicates with patients, and everyone at the practice should be familiar with the process.