



Use of digital images for supply of medicines during COVID-19 telehealth arrangements

Background

Doctors, nurses and mental health professionals can deliver bulk-billed services via telehealth until 30 September 2020 via phone or video conferencing.

To facilitate supply of medicines prescribed during telehealth consultations, secure electronic prescribing is being fast tracked, but will not be immediately available. As an interim measure State and Commonwealth rules for prescribing have been amended to provide an alternative approach to posting prescriptions.

Interim arrangements – Prescribers

Prescribers can create a paper prescription during a telehealth consultation. The prescription must contain all information usually required and be signed.

The prescriber may then either:

- fax a copy to the patient's pharmacy of choice, or
- create a clear image of the entire prescription (such as a photo or pdf) including the barcode (if applicable), and email or text to the patient's pharmacy of choice.

For a Schedule 4 (prescription only) medicines, the prescriber must keep a copy of the prescription in their records for a period of 2 years.

For medicines in Schedule 8 (controlled drugs), the prescriber must dispatch the prescription, by post or courier, to the pharmacy which was sent the digital image. Prescriptions must be dispatched in five working days. The prescription should be marked, by the prescriber, to indicate that it is a confirmation of an immediate request to supply on a digital image.

Digital images and original prescriptions should be sent directly to a pharmacy and must not be provided to patients.

Interim arrangements – Pharmacists

Pharmacists may immediately supply a Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 medicine on receipt of a digital image issued by an authorised prescriber. Pharmacists may supply to patients in person or via home delivery in accordance with usual practice standards.

All usual dispensing records should be made, and normal labelling and supply regulations continue to apply.

For a Schedule 4 medicine, the pharmacist must keep a copy of the digital image or fax, received from the prescriber, for a period of two years.

If the prescription contains repeats, then a repeat form must be generated and attached to a hard copy of the digital image. All repeats of this type must be retained at the original dispensing pharmacy. Repeats may not be returned to the patient or transferred to another pharmacy.

Deferred supply should be managed as for repeats, using the usual PBS processes for deferrals.

For Schedule 8 medicines, prescriptions must be valid and comply with regulations in full. Pharmacists should still take adequate steps to verify the legitimacy and authenticity of the prescription, prescriber and patient.

Pharmacists must keep a copy of the digital image or fax until the original prescription is received.

If the original prescription is not received within ten working days, pharmacists should notify the Department of Health.

PBS claiming arrangements

These digital image arrangements are also permitted under PBS rules until 30 September 2020.

Pharmacists may dispense and claim PBS items from a digital image of a prescription sent through by the prescriber.

Patients are not required to sign to acknowledge receipt of PBS supply, if it is not practical for them to do so.

The PBS website should be consulted for more information on arrangements for PBS authority items and other matters.

Both State and PBS arrangements apply to all community prescribers and pharmacies in Western Australia, and to hospital prescribers and pharmacies for outpatient supply.

Last updated 9 April 2020

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