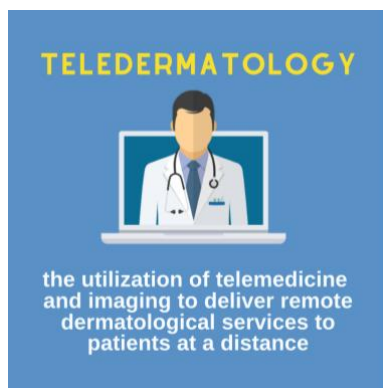


## TELEDERMATOLOGY

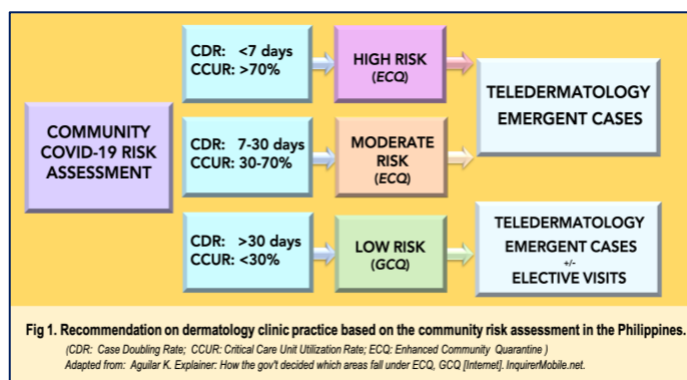


The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed telemedicine into the forefront of medical practice world-wide. In-person patient encounters have been minimized while telemedicine is maximized in order to reduce the transmission of infection. The "new normal" of dermatology clinical practice is tele dermatology. The need for in-person consultations will be decided by the dermatologist's best judgement.

**Telemedicine** refers to the “utilization of visual communication, data information, and interactive audio to effectuate the transfer of medical information, and to facilitate remote patient consultations, diagnosis, and treatment”.<sup>1</sup>  
**Tele dermatology** is the “utilization of telemedicine and imaging to deliver remote dermatological services, both clinical and laboratory, to patients located at a distance”.<sup>2</sup>

### A. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, tele dermatology must be used in communities with high risk assessment and must be optimized in low to moderate risk communities (See Fig. 1).<sup>3,4</sup>
2. Currently, the Philippines lacks national legislation, rules, and regulations specific for “the practice of medicine utilizing telemedicine by both Filipino and foreign licensed physicians catering to patients residing in the Philippines”.<sup>2</sup> During this pandemic, the Department of Health (DOH) has permitted the use of telemedicine, likewise, the Philippine Food and Drug Administration has permitted the issuance of electronic prescriptions.



### B. TELEMEDICINE GUIDANCE<sup>2</sup>

The following are telemedicine guidance provided by the Medical Informatics Unit, University of the Philippines Manila.

1. Persons who can practice telemedicine are:
  - 1.1. A physician with a valid medical license issued by the Philippine Professional Regulatory Commission.
  - 1.2. A patient physically residing in the Philippines.
2. The minimum competencies to practice telemedicine are:
  - 2.1. Digital communication skills.
  - 2.2. Knowledge of technology and equipment to be used.
  - 2.3. Ethical practice.
3. The following are needed to be able to set up telemedicine:
  - 3.1. Communication device.
  - 3.2. Stable internet connection: for video or chat software.
  - 3.3. Private, well-lit location (video consultation).

### C. TELEDERMATOLOGY PLATFORMS

1. Evaluate software or platform according to security, usability, and customer service.<sup>5</sup> You may use a platform that can perform both store-and-forward and live interactive teledermatology (hybrid) (See Appendix I).<sup>6</sup>
2. Ensure data privacy and security by choosing digital systems or platforms that are compliant with the Philippine Data Privacy Act (DPA), or Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).<sup>5</sup>
3. These systems are cloud-based and encrypted.
4. Examples of these platforms are: Medifi, Doxy.me, and SeriousMD.
5. Avoid applications like FaceTime, Zoom, and instant messaging apps (questionable to no security, data privacy issues, and loss of physician's anonymity).<sup>5,7</sup>

### D. HOW TO ESTABLISH A TELEDERMATOLOGY PRACTICE

1. Select the telemedicine platform that is secure and user-friendly. Patient's access to the platform should also be an important consideration.<sup>5</sup>
2. Learn how to use the telemedicine platform through tutorials and live demonstrations.
3. Inform patients about your consultation hours to avoid potential infringement on your privacy.<sup>5,8,9</sup>
4. Post information about the process of teleconsultation, billing, and payment methods.
5. Post instructions for patients on [how to take proper photographs of skin lesions](#).<sup>6</sup> Use visual aids to provide guidance and manage expectations. Photographs should be clear enough to see skin lesion surface characteristics.
6. An appointment system is recommended. You, your secretary, the telemedicine platform, or your clinic facility may manage appointments, triage, and reminders for you and the patient.
7. Prepare a contingency plan just in case there is a glitch in the technology (e.g., internet connection).

### E. HOW TO CONDUCT A HIGH QUALITY TELEDERMATOLOGY CONSULTATION<sup>10</sup>

1. **Be punctual** for the appointment.
2. **Have a professional appearance.** This is important for live stream consultations. Dress appropriately. Ensure that your background has a professional look as well.
3. **Secure informed consent** before any personal information about the patient is collected and prior to the formal consultation. Both parties must adhere to the Data Privacy Act (See Appendix II.).
4. **Convey value with your welcome.** If you are using a live stream platform, smile. Introduce yourself, verify the patient by means of name, age, birthday, address, phone number as deemed appropriate.
5. **Orient the patient to the technology** if he/she is a first-time user.
6. **Set a collaborative agenda** with the patient. Explain how you will get the information you need for diagnosis and treatment.
7. **Provide feedback to your patient** about the quality of the photographs sent. Request for better quality images if necessary.
8. **Keep a detailed record** of the history, skin findings, assessment, advice/management given and the information received. A secure electronic medical record is advised.
9. **Express empathy.** Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal cues.
10. **Practice reflective listening.** Summarize and clarify questions in case of delay or signal interference.
11. **Provide closure.** Give a clear sign to the patient that the consultation is coming to a close. At the end of the consultation, summarize the important points. Ensure that the patient has understood your advice and instructions, and take steps to encourage patient follow-up.
12. **Issue a valid electronic prescription.** A copy of the electronic prescription should be kept in the patient's medical records.



13. **Bill the patient.** Telemedicine platforms have billing, payment, and invoice issuance features built-in. Your secretary or clinic may do the billing. Payment may be made prior to the consultation or immediately after through credit/debit card, electronic wallets, or bank transfer. Health maintenance organizations may have specific policies on teledermatology consultations and payment or reimbursement schemes.

## F. MANAGEMENT OF DATA PRIVACY RISKS<sup>9</sup>



1. Any personal information obtained in the course of the consult should be kept confidential.
2. Personal information of patients should not be used for any purpose other than medical treatment.
3. Store only information that is necessary for the patient's care, in a secured, password protected folder and device.
4. When using messaging applications, check the privacy settings of the platform. Patients should be informed that the available platforms are not fully secure, and they should be given the option not to proceed with the consult.
5. Avoid using public-facing platforms like YouTube or Facebook Live for telehealth consults.
6. Talk to the patients about their privacy concerns, if any.
7. Before starting the consultation, the informed consent should include an agreement that video or audio recording of the consultation shall not be permitted.

**Useful link:** *Quick guide to store-and-forward teledermatology for referring providers.*

[https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AMERICANTELEMED/3c09839a-fffd-46f7-916c-692c11d78933/UploadedImages/SIGs/Quick%20Guide%20SF\\_Final.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AMERICANTELEMED/3c09839a-fffd-46f7-916c-692c11d78933/UploadedImages/SIGs/Quick%20Guide%20SF_Final.pdf)

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