

# Guideline

<i>Title:</i>	Appropriate Use of Teledentistry
<i>References:</i>	Chapter 18.32, 18.130, and 70.02 RCW, RCW 48.43.735, 41.05.700 Chapter 246-817 and 246-16 WAC, and American Dental Association
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Advances in technology, communication and data management have resulted in new approaches to delivery of oral health care services, including those in which dentist and patient are not in the same physical location, but interact using enabling technology. These new approaches, referred to as teledentistry, are useful tools that, if employed appropriately, can provide important benefits to patients, including increased access to oral health care, access to oral health care professionals that are not available in the patient’s home community, rapid availability of patient records, and a potential reduction in the cost of oral health care delivery. Realizing that these new practice forms will require oversight and regulation, the Dental Quality Assurance Commission (Commission) developed this guideline to describe how teledentistry is to be defined, supervised, regulated and disciplined by the Commission consistent with existing statutes governing the practice of dentistry within the state of Washington. The Commission recognizes that technology changes occur rapidly, so this guideline provides general principles that are technologically neutral rather than focusing on the use of any specific current technologies.

## Definitions

“Dentist-Patient Relationship” is the relationship between a dentist and a receiver of oral health care services (patient) based on mutual understanding of their shared responsibility for the patient’s oral health care. The relationship is clearly established when the dentist agrees to undertake diagnosis and/or treatment of the patient and the patient agrees that the dentist will diagnose and/or treat, whether or not there has been or is an in-person encounter between the parties. The parameters of the dentist-patient

relationship for teledentistry should mirror those that would be expected for similar in-person dental encounters.

“Enabling Technology” means the use of electronic technology or media, including interactive audio or video, for the purpose of diagnosing or treating a patient or consulting with other health care providers regarding a patient’s diagnosis or treatment.

“Health care provider” means a licensed dentist, dental hygienist, expanded function dental auxiliary, allopathic physician and surgeon, osteopathic physician and surgeon, advanced registered nurse practitioner, registered nurse, or licensed practical nurse authorized to perform tasks within their specific scope of practice.

“In-person” means interaction(s) between the dentist and the patient that occur in the same physical space, and does not include interactions that occur through the use of enabling technology.

“Practice of dentistry” has the same meaning as RCW 18.32.020. Teledentistry is included within the practice of dentistry and is not a separate discipline.

“Teledentistry” is the practice of dentistry using enabling technology between a dentist in one location and a patient in another location with or without an intervening practitioner. It is a tool in dentistry practice, not a separate form of dentistry.

### **Guidelines for Appropriate use of Teledentistry**

- A. Licensure: A dentist using teledentistry to practice dentistry on patients in Washington must be licensed to practice dentistry in Washington.
  - 1. This includes dentists who treat or prescribe to Washington patients through online service sites.
  - 2. A dentist may delegate allowable tasks to Washington licensed dental hygienists, and licensed expanded function dental auxiliaries through teledentistry. Delegation of tasks through teledentistry must be under the general supervision provided in WAC 246-817-525 and 550. Teledentistry does not meet the definition of close supervision as the dentist is not physically present.
  
- B. Standard of Care: Dentists using teledentistry will be held to the same standard of care as practitioners engaging in more traditional in-person care delivery, including the requirement to meet all technical, clinical, confidentiality and ethical standards required by law. Failure to conform to the standard of care, whether rendered in person or via teledentistry, may subject the practitioner to potential discipline by the Commission. Some elements of the standard of care as applied to teledentistry include:
  - 1. Dentist-Patient Relationship: When practicing teledentistry, a dentist must establish a practitioner-patient relationship with the patient. The absence of in-person contact does not eliminate this requirement. Patient completion of a questionnaire does not, by itself, establish a practitioner-patient relationship, and therefore treatment, including prescriptions, based solely on a questionnaire does not constitute an acceptable standard of care.
    - a. The dentist must provide proof of identity, jurisdiction, and licensure status to the patient.

- b. The dentist must make appropriate effort to confirm the patient's identity. If patient is a minor, the dentist must make appropriate effort to confirm the parent or legal guardian is present when required.
    - c. The dentist must confirm and document the patient is physically located in a jurisdiction in which the dentist is licensed.
  2. Informed Consent: As with oral health care involving in-person contact, a dentist should obtain and document appropriate informed consent for teledentistry encounters. Because of the unique characteristics of teledentistry, it is best practice for the informed consent to include:
    - a. The manner in which the dentist and patient will use particular enabling technologies, the boundaries that will be established and observed, and procedures for responding to electronic communications from patients;
    - b. Issues and potential risks surrounding confidentiality and security of patient information when particular enabling technologies are used (e.g., potential for decreased expectation of confidentiality if certain technologies are used);
    - c. Limitations on the availability and/or appropriateness of specific teledentistry services that may be hindered as a result of the services being offered through teledentistry.
  3. Patient Evaluation: An appropriate history and evaluation of the patient must precede the rendering of any care, including provision of prescriptions. Not all patient situations will be appropriate for teledentistry. Evaluating the adequacy and significance of any examination remains the responsibility of the teledentistry dentist. Since, by definition, teledentistry does not involve in-person contact between dentist and patient, if circumstances require in-person contact, a credentialed health care provider may provide in person observations.
    - a. The credentialed health care provider is authorized to perform tasks within their specific scope of practice.
    - b. The credentialed health care provider is acceptable to the teledentistry dentist and the patient.
    - c. If a credentialed health care provider is unable to perform a specific task, the teledentistry dentist should advise the patient to be seen by a dentist in-person.
  4. Allowable Treatment Parameters: The teledentistry dentist may provide any treatment deemed appropriate for the patient, including prescriptions, if the evaluation performed is adequate to justify the action taken. The dentist is responsible for knowing the limitations of the care he or she can provide, no matter how the care is delivered. Just as in a traditional setting, teledentistry dentists should recognize situations that are beyond their expertise, their ability, or the limits of available technology to adequately evaluate or manage in the existing circumstances, and refer such patients for appropriate care.
  5. Patient Records: Dentists providing teledentistry services must document the encounter appropriately and completely so that the record clearly, concisely and accurately reflects what occurred during the encounter. Such records should be permanent and easily available to or on behalf of the patient and other practitioners in accordance with patient consent, direction and applicable standards. Dentists should maintain security and confidentiality of the patient record in compliance with applicable laws and regulations related to the maintenance and transmission of such records. Dentists must comply with dental patient record requirements in WAC 246-817-304, 305, and 310.
  6. Prescriptions: Prescribing medications, whether in person or via teledentistry, is at the professional discretion of the dentist. The dentist, in accordance with current standards of practice, must evaluate the indications, appropriateness, and safety considerations for each

teledentistry prescription. Teledentistry prescriptions entail the same professional accountability as prescriptions incident to an in-person contact. Where appropriate clinical procedures and considerations are applied and documented, dentists may exercise their judgment and prescribe medications as part of teledentistry. Especially careful consideration should apply before prescribing controlled substances, and compliance with all laws and regulations pertaining to such prescriptions is expected. Measures to assure informed, accurate and error-free prescribing practices (e.g. integration with e-Prescription services) are encouraged.