

SECONDARY CARE 10 TOP TIPS

Telephone consultations (healthcare professionals)

This edition: December 2020
Next planned review: May 2021

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- 1** Prepare your work environment. Ensure you are in a quiet workspace with minimal background noise. Ensure you have access to patients' notes and/or computer systems. Invest in a headset – this leaves your hands free to update notes and the sound will be better for your caller than using standard handsfree.
- 2** Don't assume that telephone consults will be shorter and prepare enough time for the conversation. Consider using a checklist or template.
- 3** Check if a preferred number has been given to call. If there is an answering machine remember to respect confidentiality with any messages left.
- 4** Introductions are important. Introduce yourself with full name and clearly explain your role. Clarify who you are talking to, and who else is involved in the conversation. Check the identity of the patient preferably with 3 identifiers (name, address, date of birth).
- 5** Check where the patient is and that they are comfortable prior to beginning the consultation. Ask if there is anyone else they would like to include who is not already present.
- 6** Telephone consultations can increase health inequalities. It may be more difficult for patients with English as a second language, patients with a learning disability, or those with hearing or speech impairments. Be prepared to facilitate face to face consultation if necessary, for these groups.
- 7** Communication without non-verbal cues can be challenging. Open questions allow patients time and space to express their thoughts and feelings, but closed questions may be required to bring the consultation into focus. Listen carefully and allow silences in order to pick up subtle audible clues (sighing, crying, breathing pattern).
- 8** Research shows that there is less problem disclosure from patients in telephone consultations. This is more pronounced in male patients. Be prepared to ask far more direct questions.
- 9** Do not allow the format to compromise essential aspects of care. Continually reflect on whether the patient requires a physical review. Audit your conversion rate from telephone to physical attendance as this will help service planning.
- 10** Look after yourself and be active. A sedentary clinic spent sitting entirely at a monitor and telephone is unhealthy. Take short breaks or stand during some consultations.