

Support for physician outreach on virtual care Phase Two

On Friday, April 3rd, Doctors of BC launched Phase One of our campaign to ensure patients are aware that BC's doctors are open for business, and to let patients know that if they need care, they should call their doctor first. We received solid media coverage, including a front-page story in the Times Colonist. The news release can be found [here](#).

Our social media campaign continues to build. As of Monday, our ad campaign was seen by 120,000 people across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Here is our social media campaign captured in just a few words.



Capturing the public's attention in the midst of the massive amount of information being communicated during this pandemic is a challenge. The best way to reach patients is to keep our message clear, connect emotionally with the reader or viewer, have a clean, compelling visual identity, and repeat, repeat, repeat.

Note: Messaging and Media Q and A can be found in the Appendix.

So what's next?

Phase One provided a foundation for this campaign.

The next phase is designed to sustain the outreach really bring it home. And that involves you: physicians in the communities where you live and practice. You have the trust of the people in your community. You can speak to them as “their doctors,”—the ones that know them best.

This is the power of grassroots communication. In today's media, expensive TV ads get attention. However, one of the most successful way to reach and influence audiences is with communications at the community level. And that is where you can make a difference.

We have created some “templates” to support you in this work. Below you will find a sample patient e-mail, social media posts, and an op-ed to adapt and share with your local media. We also came up with some creative and innovative suggestions for outreach—however, we believe some of the best creative and innovative approaches come from you. Let us know what you’re doing and we’ll share your ideas with others.

Looking for the news release, messaging, and Q & A from last week? You’ll find it in the Appendix to this document.

Need assistance?

If you need assistance in preparation for media, please contact Sharon Shore, Media Relations Manager, Doctors of BC sshore@doctorsofbc.ca
Marisa Adair, VP Communications, Doctors of BC madair@doctorsofbc.ca

1. Send a letter to patients via e-mail

One of the simplest and most efficient ways to communicate with your patients to let them know you are open for business is by sending them an e-mail. Some may feel like that is an “old-fashioned” thing to do. But an e-mail coming from the patient’s doctor who knows them well (who does not ordinarily take the step of e-mailing patients) **will stand out**.

If you don’t have a current list of e-mail addresses for your patients, you may wish to contact patients via phone—either personally, or you can have your staff check in with them and get their e-mail addresses. You can use this as an opportunity to check in on your patients who have chronic conditions, make sure your vulnerable patients have the support they need, or have conversations about topics like advance care planning. Remember that when you reach out in this way, these virtual care visits are billable to MSP. For information on virtual care billing, visit <https://www.doctorsofbc.ca/news/covid-19-temporary-billing-changes>.

Doctors of BC has developed the following letter template to get you started on an e-mail to send to patients.

Patient e-mail template:

To my patients,

I am writing to let you know that I have made changes to the way I see patients in order to keep us all safe from transmission of COVID-19.

Like many doctors around the province, I have transitioned to a virtual care practice—this means I am able to connect with you using telephone and video conference (telemedicine). Virtual care enables doctors to assess and treat patients and (if necessary) prescribe

medication in the vast majority of cases based on our visit over the phone or by video. If you do need an in-person visit, we can arrange that too in a way that will be safe.

It is important during this challenging time that we continue to address your medical issues, especially if you have ongoing health conditions.

Booking an appointment is easy, and my staff will walk you through this process every step of the way.

For more information on what virtual care means for patients, check out this [patient Q and A](#).

You can book an appointment by [insert instructions]

Thank you.

Script for MOAs to use when reaching out to patients

Hi, this is [insert name] from Dr [insert name]'s office.

How are you doing today? Is now a good time to talk for a few minutes? This isn't an urgent call, everything is okay.

I'm calling to let you know that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the doctor is doing visits by telephone and video conference.

This allows him/her to treat patients while keeping you and the doctor safe.

How are you feeling? Do you feel you need an appointment at this time?

If you do need an appointment, contact us at [insert phone number] and I will walk you through the steps to connect by telephone/video.

I also want to ask if you would be comfortable sharing your e-mail with us for our files? This way we can reach out to you by e-mail with future updates on how the doctor can provide you with care in these challenging times.

Thank you and take care.

2. Post the virtual care poster on your clinic door or on your website

Doctors of BC has produced an [editable/printable poster \(MS Word\) for clinics](#) to notify patients that they are providing some of their care and visits virtually, either over the phone or through video. This poster is available in eight languages. There is room for the clinic to fill out their email, phone number, and clinic name. If you are still seeing patients in your clinic, this can be posted on the clinic entrance and/or in the waiting area; it can also be added to clinic websites.

3. Take to social media

Social media is one of the most effective ways to connect with people. You can share simple messages on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media channels. You can also retweet and share posts from our @DoctorsofBC accounts.

When posting to social media, you may want to use the visual we have created (below). This allows for the repetition of visual messaging that we talked about earlier. If not, that's okay too.

Either way it's a good idea to use the hashtags we created: #VirtualCARE and #BCdocs

Suggested social media captions/tweets for divisions or other physician groups:

- Patients: Your Family Physicians and Specialists can now see you via #VirtualCARE as we all #stay_home to stop the spread of COVID-19. Call their office for an appointment.
- If you're ill or need care for ongoing conditions, your doctor can often treat you via phone and video without having to see you in person. Call your doctor's office to make an appointment
- Doctors are now seeing patients via #VirtualCARE. Many conditions can be treated over the phone or via video. Call your doctor's office from the safety of your home to set up an appointment
- As we #stay_home to help stop the spread of COVID-19, doctors are now using #VirtualCARE to see patients. If you're sick or need care, call to make an appointment

Graphics: These visuals are available to use in your social media posts

- [Facebook and Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Instagram story](#)

4. Get creative

Divisions can host a webinar or Zoom call to relay information to their local communities. This can be led by the Physician Lead or another doctor. You can either ask participants to submit questions beforehand or screen their questions as they come in. Virtual care would be the main topic.

Share photos or video on social media or YouTube of you working from home, or of your home office set up.

Ask patients to post on social media about their experiences seeing a doctor virtually using the hashtags #VirtualCARE #bcdocs.

Send us your creative or innovative approaches, and we will share them with others on the Doctors of BC website.

5. Reach out to your local media

Community radio, TV, and newspapers continue to play an important role in communications. In the multi-media universe, people still look to these media outlets as a way to stay up to date on what is going on their communities.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- **Do your research.**
What interesting fact or “angle” can you provide based on what’s happening locally that advances the story? For example: how many clinics in your community are now providing virtual care? If the number is high, this might be your angle. “80% of physicians in (insert community) are now providing virtual care”.
- **Do your own local news release.**
The most important thing is to differentiate it from the provincial release by providing local information. Keep it simple. No more than one page in length. Provide a physician comment and, if possible, a patient comment on their experience using virtual care. This makes the story more personal. Make sure you get across why this shift is a good thing – it is easy for patients, and it keeps both patients and physicians safe during this difficult time. Send it in electronically to local media outlets.
- **Reaching out to media directly**
Follow up your news release with a call to your local media. Ensure your media outlet received the news release. If media is interested, they will likely want an interview. Make sure the spokesperson is a physician, and if you can, bring in a patient who would comment on their experience with virtual care.
 - **Radio stations**
Let them know you are available to do a news clip, or to be interviewed on one of their talk shows. (It’s okay to contact radio stations in the Lower Mainland, it’s just a lot harder to get their attention).
 - **TV stations**
Reaching out to your local TV station is a great idea, but you must ensure that you have the visuals to go along with the story. The reporter will want to tape you doing a virtual care consultation. Find a patient who can speak to their experience with virtual care.
 - **Newspapers**
The same instructions as for a news release. The picture will also be important here.

The reporter will likely want a picture of a physician providing virtual care to a patient. If the patient can speak to their experience, that's even better.

Writing an Op-Ed (Opinion Editorial) to the newspaper

You might want to consider organizing a group of physicians in your community to author an Op-Ed to talk about the value of seeing patients—no matter their health concern—at this time. The nice thing about submitting an Op-Ed is your entire piece will get printed as written. The reporter doesn't get to pick and choose which elements to include as they would in a news story. Add in the signatures of every physician in your group.

Here are some proposed titles, but you can make up your own, too.

Titles:

(Insert community) physicians are available by phone or video, making it easy and safe for you to get medical care

A message from your local physicians: We are here for you to ensure your medical needs are addressed during this pandemic

The doctor is in: 80% of (insert community) doctors are now treating patients by phone or video

Suggested content:

Doctors in (insert community) have made changes to the way we see our patients, to help you stay safe from COVID-19, and to ensure that we and our office staff stay safe as well.

We know that a lot of people are concerned about going to their physician's office or going to the emergency room during this difficult time, but we want to emphasize how important it is for people to make sure they are receiving ongoing care from their family doctor. (XX%) of physicians in [insert community] are now providing that care virtually—via video or by phone.

Through virtual care, we can ensure our patients are able to access the care they need for most conditions. Virtual care enables us to treat patients and, if necessary, to prescribe medication

If an in-person visit is needed, our offices will arrange that too, in a way that will be safe.

It is important during this challenging time that you continue to address your medical issues with your family doctor as much as possible, especially if you have a chronic

condition. Receiving care from the doctor who knows you best, and who is familiar with your medical history ensures this information is taken into account.

Booking a virtual care appointment is easy—our staff will walk you through this process every step of the way.

(see Appendix A on the next page)

Appendix A

Key messages

- Your physician is available to provide care to patients by using telephone or video during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Many people may not be dealing with medical issues because they believe we have closed our offices.
- We are providing care in a different way that allows people to connect with their own doctors from the safety of their home.
- By using virtual care, we can ensure our patients are safe, and can maintain physical distancing to reduce the risk of transmission. We can also ensure our physicians are safe, so that they can continue to provide medical services throughout this difficult time.
- Although the virus is top of mind right now, people still need ongoing care and advice for acute or chronic conditions requiring treatment or medication. We can provide a lot of that medical care through telephone or video.
- As family physicians, we know you best. We know your medical histories, your families, your circumstances, and we are in the best position to meet your medical needs.
- For seniors living at home, those with disabilities, or people considering themselves to be high-risk, it is especially important that they contact their doctor for advice if they have not already connected.
- To book an appointment, just call our office number. Our medical office staff will walk you through how the visit will work, whether it is on telephone or video.
- The important thing is not show up at our office door. Always call in advance.
- If a patient does need an in-person visit, we will assist in setting that up, whether it is in our own office, or at a designated clinic.

Media Q and A

Why are you doing this now?

We are letting patients know that we are here to see them by using virtual care – telephone or video.

We recognize that this is a sudden change in how we deliver care. We are concerned that patients may not know this, and are dealing with medical issues that are not being addressed, and may end up getting worse over the long term.

We want people to know we are here, we are available, and we are the ones who know them best – we know their medical histories, their families, their circumstances – and we can best meet their needs.

Why are doctors using so much more virtual care so suddenly?

During this pandemic, it is important that we all do what we can to keep everyone safe. One way we can do this is through providing virtual care to our patients. Virtual care enables patients to stay safe, reducing the risk of transmission of the virus. It also keeps doctors safe, so that we can continue to provide care throughout this challenging time. This is not new technology, but it has not been widely used up until now and the numbers of virtual care visits we normally do is much lower.

The BC government and Doctors of BC have agreed to significantly increase our ability to use virtual care to see patients during this pandemic.

What happens if I do need an in-person visit?

If your doctor determines that you need an in-person visit, that will be arranged and will take place in a way that maximizes the safety of both you and your doctor.

What if I don't have a family doctor?

Check the [medimap.ca](https://www.medimap.ca) website. It will provide information on which walk-in clinics are providing services. Many of them have also shifted to virtual care.

Are you worried about so many patients going to Telus or Babylon? They are doing huge advertising campaigns right now.

Those companies are for-profit organizations, and they are essentially offering a remote “walk-in clinic” service.

As family physicians, we know your medical histories and your families—we are in the best position to meet patients’ needs. We have relationships with patients built over many years. We are here today, and we will continue to be here for you in the years to come.

Will you also take calls from patients who are worried they have symptoms of COVID-19?

Yes, we will. Patients can call us about any medical issues they are concerned about.

We encourage them to try the self-assessment tool available on the government website, as that may address their concerns even before they call us.
But we are here and we will help.

Will you be doing testing for COVID-19?

Testing is being done through designated assessment centers in our community.
We can speak with patients and determine whether they need to go to one of those centers for testing or not.

Do patients have to pay for virtual care?

Virtual appointments are covered by the BC Medical Services Plan.

What if I really feel I have to see my doctor in-person?

You should call your doctor's office.
We will make it very easy to connect with you over the phone if you are not able to do video conferencing.

Once we have spoken with you, we will assess whether an in-person visit is needed. If so, we will arrange to do that in a safe way.

Is my privacy ensured?

The systems we use are very reliable. We will do everything we can to ensure your privacy is protected.

You can also do your part by: taking the call from a private area and using your own internet connection rather than a public connection.