

## COVID-19

16 April 2020

Dear GMG Member,

We continue to update you on the COVID-19 pandemic.

See the latest update below, especially developments from Discovery Health.

### 1. Use of Cloth Masks

The use of cloth masks and scarves is currently being evaluated and the evidence supports that they can be effective, along with hand washing, in stopping the spread of the droplets that cause infection. It is important to understand that wearing masks is not helpful if people constantly touch the mask or their face and do not wash their hands regularly. All of these measures are necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

### 2. Addressing Shortages of PPE

Because of the current critical shortage of essential protective equipment such as N95 and surgical masks, use of these should be restricted to healthcare workers working in the front line, treating critically ill patients infected by the virus. These healthcare workers include doctors, nurses, allied health professional and all support staff working in facilities that provide healthcare. It is not appropriate for the general public out on their daily trip to and from work or any other daily activity to be wearing these medical grade masks.

### 3. Discovery and COVID-19

Due to the complexities we are facing around COVID-19, Discovery Health has made a decision to waive out of network (OON) penalties for all network plans (Coastal, Delta, Smart and KeyCare) for the duration of the lockdown period. This will be applicable to non-emergency COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related admissions. Emergency admissions will continue being BAU with the system already waiving OON rules for these admissions.

DH has implemented measures to manage this change in process in our operational areas.

For preauthorization requests through the call centre, the penalty or decline (in the case of KeyCare) will be waived during the call.

Please note that all other scheme benefit rules would still apply e.g. General Scheme Exclusion rules.

Preauthorization requests for the B2B enabled hospitals should continue being loaded on B2B, and we will manage these manually with a daily report and waive the OON penalty on these events.

This gesture from DH will help alleviate some of the pressure in the healthcare system for both the hospitals and the members.

### 4. Private Sector Co-operation with Department of Health

The COVID-19 crisis seems to be putting in place public/private co-operation as government and companies seem to work closely together in the fight against the pandemic.

Private hospitals report that they have started treating state patients for COVID-19. It seems as if government is working with them to coordinate resources.

This could forge new relationships and cooperation in future.

The COVID-19 outbreak has already done more in two weeks to acquire public sector patient access to private facilities than 10 years of National Health Insurance (NHI) planning and pilot projects have done, according to Dr Johann Serfontein in Medical Brief (1 April 2020)

As the national response to the COVID-19 crisis is showing us, a rapid and effective removal of the separation between the public and private service delivery systems in South Africa can help us achieve optimal nationwide response not only to this and the inevitable future epidemics, but also pave the way towards universal healthcare in future, according to an editorial in the Citizen (*Outbreak provides valuable insights needed to implement National Health Insurance – The Citizen 6 April 2020*)

SAPPF is engaging with DoH and Trade & Industry on whether doctors can be allowed to engage with Hospital Groups on the pricing of services to be made available to DoH for caring for Public Sector patients.

### 5. Discovery & Vodacom Team up to Help

Discovery and Vodacom announced that they will cooperate to offer the public free virtual consultations with doctors to help diagnose and treat those exhibiting symptoms of the coronavirus.

The cost of the consultation will be funded by Discovery and Vodacom. The data used during the consultation, if individuals use the Vodacom network to do so, will also be free.

The public can go on to Discovery's or Vodacom's website, as well as use the Discovery app, to begin selfscreening. Vodacom also expects to make the service available shortly via the USSD

Inform your pregnant patient of this offer available to them if they require to access more benefits to screen for COVID-19, especially when they are short of funding.

### 6. Corona and Trends in Transmission in South Africa

In the report "SA's COVID-19 epidemic: Trends & Next steps" prepared for Minister of Health Zweli Mkhize by CAPRISA chairperson Professor Salim S. Abdool Karim, SA has a unique epidemic trajectory as compared to other countries. Professor Abdool Karim states that the current trajectory seem to be due to curtailed community transmission from effective early interventions. He further states that the exponential curve is almost inevitable. The lockdown bought SA some time (about 4 to 6 weeks) and will likely reduce peak case load (flattened curve), he continued, and that a systematic approach is needed to keeping infection rates low while easing lockdown in stages. Prof Abdool Karim now wants the focus to shifts to Stage 5 of hotspot identification and intervention (fighting flames before they become fires), Stage 6, which will be for preparing for peak medical care response and thereafter Stage 8 which is the vigilance and national surveillance

### 7. HPCSA's Recommendations for Telehealth

The HPCSA has provided guidance on the use of Telemedicine in its General Ethical Guidelines for good practice in Telemedicine (Booklet 10 - Telemedicine). These guidelines discourage patients from being routinely serviced by practitioners virtually, that is, directly without the consulting and responsible practitioner's physical presence.

However, in view of the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the HPCSA hereby permits the use of Telehealth (which broadly includes Telemedicine, Telepsychology, Telepsychiatry and Telerehabilitation etc.) for managing patients remotely using virtual platforms, including video and telephonic links.

Initially the use of Telehealth was restricted to already established relationships (practitioner-patient relationship), but now the rule allows new patients to be serviced. Telephone and/or virtual consultations for new patients is discouraged. Practitioners are always required to conduct themselves ethically and professionally during telephonic and/or virtual consultations.

These revised provisions on the use of Telehealth are only applicable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The HPCSA shall soon after the end of the pandemic, make announcements on the continued use of this guidance.

### 8. COMMUNICATIONS

For access to documents relevant to all aspects of the COVID-19 response, please send an email to: [COVID@healthman.co.za](mailto:COVID@healthman.co.za) and you will receive an email with the document library. This will be developed and improved over time.

We trust that this information contained herein will be of assistance to you.

Keep on with measures to stay COVID-19 free.



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