



## Telemedicine Position Statement

Telemedicine is an increasingly utilized method of healthcare delivery, particularly to provide care in rural and remote areas. Canada is among the world leaders in telemedicine, and the Canadian Dermatology Association supports the expansion of the practice of teledermatology in that it may allow care to patients who might otherwise not have been able to access dermatologic care locally.

Two different forms of teledermatology exist: live interactive teledermatology and the more commonly used store-and-forward teledermatology. In Live Interactive (or Synchronous) Teledermatology, the patient and the dermatologist are linked in real time by camera. This is similar to a traditional in office visit but (at least at this time) there is no tactile interaction possible. In Store-and-Forward (or Asynchronous) Teledermatology doctors can securely send digital photographs and a brief description of a patient's skin condition to a dermatologist. The dermatologist can then review the file at their convenience and provide a diagnosis and treatment plan. Evidence supports patients' overall satisfaction with teledermatology.<sup>1</sup> Teledermatology allows timely access to dermatologists, improves efficiencies and reduces patients' wait times and travel, as well as curbs healthcare costs.

When practicing teledermatology, physicians need to consider regulations imposed by the Canadian Medical Colleges. The Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) has outlined some of these challenges and obligations in relation to telemedicine<sup>2</sup>. For instance, various Canadian jurisdictions and provinces may have different licensure requirements for telemedicine, as well as various policies on issues such as privacy and record keeping. Physicians engaged in telemedicine should be satisfied that reasonable security protocols are in place to adequately protect patient information transmitted via electronic means. Most reputable telemedicine service providers recognize the importance of information security and employ a variety of protection mechanisms, such as passwords and encryption, to minimize the risk of unauthorized access to patient data.<sup>2</sup>

Care must be taken to ensure appropriate use of teledermatology particularly with regard to follow-up care. Without this dermatologists in remote communities may actually perceive teledermatology as a further burden on their already hectic schedules as they are pressed to follow-up on patients in their communities seen by a remote dermatologist with no follow-up care planned.

Telemedicine is an evolving branch of the healthcare delivery system. In a country as vast as Canada with an uneven clustering of the population, we would expect that reliance on ancillary methods of healthcare provision will continue to expand and physicians would do well to keep abreast of new developments in this arena.

### References:

1. Hsueh MH, Eastman K, et al. Teledermatology patient satisfaction in the Pacific Northwest. *Telemedicine and e-Health*. 2012 June; 18(5): 377-81.
2. Telemedicine – Opportunities, challenges and obligations. Canadian Medical Protective Association, 2013.

*Approved by CDA Board of Directors  
March 22, 2015*