



## What is telehealth?

**MALT Message: Telehealth in practice raises uncertainties for both clinical staff and potential users. For example, when telehealth might be used and who can derive benefit from the technology. These uncertainties need to be addressed if telehealth is to be successfully embedded into health services.**

One of the challenges is concerned with the term 'telehealth'. It is often used interchangeably with telemonitoring, which involves the remote health

monitoring of patients living at home. It can also be used to describe devices that enable patients to become more involved in managing their health. The MALT study has identified that telehealth can refer to any technology that enables clinicians to care for patients at a distance, to obtain clinical data and information from patients remotely, and enable shared decision making with patients and with other colleagues without having to see them in person.

## Challenging assumptions and opinions about telehealth

### **MYTH: Telehealth only measures vital signs**

While it is true that many telehealth systems measure vital signs, a great deal of information about a person's health can be transferred remotely. Information can also be provided directly to patients via telehealth. This can include educational materials, lifestyle coaching, and medication and appointment reminders.



*'I didn't know that you could have questions on it as well. I always thought it did your readings and that was it, but it does questions that you can set it to ask like 'are you feeling breathless today?''*

### **MYTH: Telehealth is a 'box in a patient's home'**

Some forms of telehealth require specialist equipment. However, telehealth can also be provided through everyday technologies such as computers, tablet devices or mobile phones. This will become increasingly common. Modes of communication can also vary, with some telehealth using text messages or video consultation in conjunction with telephone or face to face contact.



### **MYTH: Telehealth is just a technology**

Both patients and clinicians will need to use technology if treatment and care is to be provided and shared remotely. However, clinicians and other frontline health staff continue to play a central role as they support patients both in person and at a distance.



### **MYTH: Telehealth is mainly for people with complex long-term conditions**



*'So far it tends to focus on the top of the pyramid and these are groups of people with, for example, respiratory diseases, people who have either been in hospital at least once or more in the past year.'*

Although telehealth has primarily been used for people whose condition is difficult to keep stable at home, remote care is now being developed for many health conditions and user groups. Services are also establishing their own telehealth systems, both to help improve the care they provide, and to offer users a choice about how they wish to interact with the service.