

Staying connected - so doctor and consumer know best

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Telehealth has proved to be of great benefit for consumers with chronic conditions at a time of strain on health services caused by COVID-19, the Consumers Health Forum says.

Many patients may be reluctant to see their doctor because of COVID-19 fears, just when it is more important than ever for them to do so, Leanne Wells, CEO of the Consumers Health Forum said.

“CHF supports the Expert Advice Matters campaign by the RACGP urging people not to neglect seeing the doctor or having tests when they need to.

“We are pleased to highlight the positive experiences reported to us by patients who have found telehealth to be such a boon.

“Louisa Di Petro, who has lived with a serious congenital condition all her life, says that telehealth has opened a liberating new chapter in her life.

“After many years of having to travel to the doctor and wait for attention several times a month, she is now able to resolve most of her multiple health care issues by telephone with her general practitioner.

Another person who is thankful for telehealth is Trish Mifsud. She lives with multiple sclerosis and is an MS Ambassador who has welcomed the introduction of telehealth.

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“Living with a chronic illness I find it is vital that I keep a regular close connection with my GP who assists me to maintain my health and wellness which has a huge impact on my chronic illness,” Ms Mifsud says

Ms Wells says the CHF shares the concern of the RACGP about the importance of patients maintaining their health care and the experiences of Ms Di Petro and Ms Mifsud, demonstrated that.

As the RACGP has said it’s very concerning that some people have potentially been neglecting their health during this pandemic. The last thing we want is a tsunami of serious health issues and worsening chronic conditions coming after this virus, simply because people have stopped taking care of themselves or consulting their GP.

Ms Di Petro told us that among the advantages of telehealth was that her exposure to infections has been reduced and she feels more able to manage her condition through telephone conversations with her doctor.

“I feel more liberated than I have been for a very long time. I feel I have had better care because in a funny way I think my GP is more available to me through telehealth,” Ms Di Petro says.

Ms Di Petro who is Education and Advocacy Consultant with the Genetic Support Network of Victoria was born with an inherited blood disorder which requires constant medical care, transfusions, specialist consultations, and exposes her to other illnesses.

Her telehealth appointments are mainly by phone although she has conducted two video appointments with specialists, her endocrinologist and neurologist.

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“The benefit is that telehealth ‘combined’ with face to face appointments can free me up a little and support flexibility . This then reduces some of the financial cost and indeed logistical demands and stress levels related to my health management.”

Ms Mifsud said that during the current COVID-19 environment she initially hesitated to attend my GP, but soon realised she could still have that close connection but from a safe distance in person or electronically.

“If my connection with my GP is not maintained it will have a negative impact on my health and in turn my work and family.

“So, I keep my GP on speed dial,” Ms Mifsud says.

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