



## GPs embrace telehealth to improve access to services in WA

Since the July 2011 implementation of Medicare rebates and financial incentives for video consultations with medical specialists in a distant location, general practitioners (GPs) working in Western Australia are embracing telehealth initiatives to improve access to healthcare services for patients.

Thanks to the increasing uptake of telehealth, patients living in rural, remote and outer metropolitan areas have greater access to a range of subsidised consultations with GPs and specialists, reducing distance and cost barriers to receive healthcare.

WA faculty chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) associate professor Frank Jones said telehealth initiatives, including video consultations and short message services (SMS), were playing an increasingly integral role in making healthcare accessible to all.

"Western Australia's vast geographical area lends itself to wide population dispersion, with a large proportion of the community residing outside

of major metropolitan hubs," he said.

"Patients who previously had to drive hundreds of kilometres to receive healthcare can now see their doctor via video conference from the convenience of their own home."

Chair RACGP telehealth standards taskforce and GP Mike Civil said the full extent of telehealth benefits were yet to be seen, with a number of opportunities to expand telehealth initiatives into areas including aged-care facilities and into the homes of people living with a disability.

"For many members of the community, including the elderly and disabled, travelling large distances to receive healthcare is not always an option," he said.

"This also goes both ways with GPs not always able to complete regular home or community visits when time and resources are limited."

To guide GPs through telehealth consultations and provide a safety and quality framework for patients and GPs, the RACGP has provided resources including:

- RACGP Standards for general practices offering video consultations
- Implementation guidelines for video consultations in general practice – Version 2.0
- Telehealth factsheet
- RACGP video consultation etiquette factsheet
- Patient information brochure on video consultations template

The RACGP WA faculty, Rural Health West and the Western Australian general practice telehealth advisory group held a free taking on telehealth workshop on March 2.

The workshop brought together industry leaders from across the country in telehealth service provision and health using and setting up this technology in their general practice.

GPs working in WA with an interest in providing telehealth services were invited to attend at no cost.

Further information can be found at [www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/go/telehealth](http://www.ruralhealthwest.com.au/go/telehealth).



