

The future of doctor-patient consultations: overcoming distance

COVID-19 is changing the dynamics of doctor-patient consultations. Regardless of whether a consultation is held in person with necessary safety measures, or remotely, forging a human connection is more difficult. Pharma companies should think about how they can support doctors and patients to overcome this distance.



Since the pandemic began, telemedicine has surged

Almost half

of GP appointments in the UK were conducted over the phone in May 2020¹

60%

of patient consultations with physicians across specialties were conducted remotely at the peak of the crisis (60% in Europe; 62% in US)²

1 billion

virtual healthcare interactions are expected to take place by the end of 2020 in the US³

It is expected that telemedicine is here to stay

Doctors in Europe estimate that six months after the pandemic the share of patient consultations conducted remotely will **stabilize at ~27%**; and in US at ~22%⁴



Some variation is seen across specialties, with **oncologists, haematologists and rheumatologists** expecting the greatest share of remote consultations, and dermatologists the lowest⁵

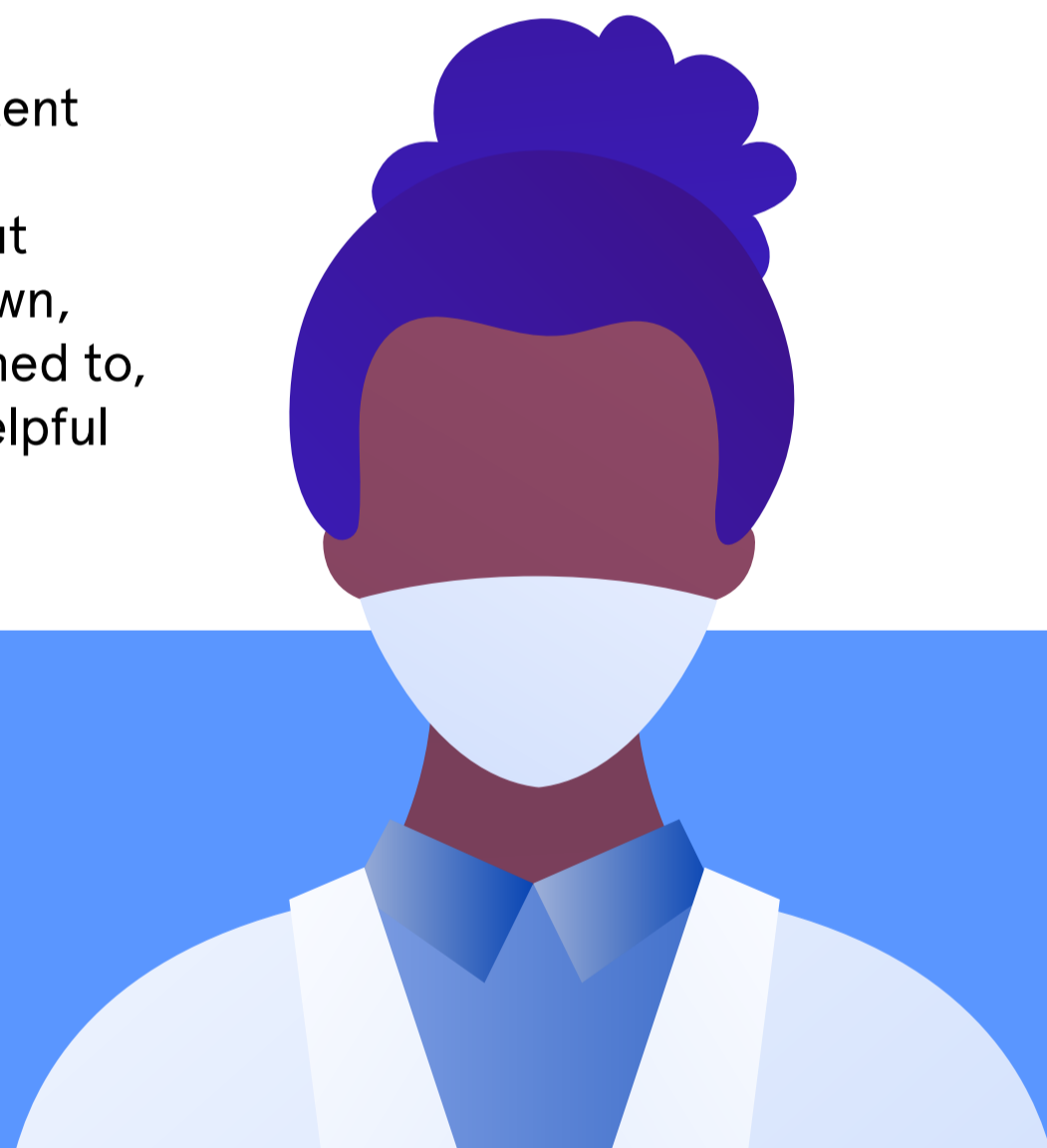
As restrictions lift, and in-person consultations resume, safety is a primary concern for all involved

As per June 2020, all consultations in the UK should take place with social distancing and face masks worn by both patients and physicians⁶

Establishing and maintaining a human connection with patients is a challenge for consultations that are conducted in-person with the requisite safety measures, or remotely

Patients perceive a significant, negative effect on empathy when doctors wear masks during in-person consultations⁷

Patients report virtual consultations affect the extent to which they perceive that important information about their medical history is known, how carefully they are listened to, and how informative and helpful they find the appointment⁸



"My protective gear and social distancing seemed to be reducing my perceived empathy with patients, and the ability to build a good patient-physician relationship."⁸

The lack of human connection may have implications for clinical outcomes

Non-verbal communication is important for the doctor-patient relationship and can impact patients' adherence to medical advice, treatment and clinical outcomes¹⁰

To address any negative aspects associated with remote or distanced consultations, pharma companies should consider four key areas:

1 / Customer engagement

Demonstrating empathy with customers about the challenges associated with daily practice in the new healthcare landscape.

3 / Business impact

Assessing how the new dynamics may impact treatment decision making and brand uptake; identify associated opportunities and risks and how to leverage/overcome them.

2 / Beyond-the-pill support

Offering training and support to help HCPs deliver remote and distanced consultations effectively.

4 / Materials

Revisiting sales aids, consultation tools and patient support materials to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

If you are interested to explore in detail how physician-patient consultations have changed in your therapy area(s), and the implications for you as a business, please **get in touch**

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¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/may-2020>

² <https://www.sermo.com/hcp-sentiment-study-series/>

³ <https://go.forrester.com/press-newsroom/us-virtual-care-visits-to-soar-to-more-than-1-billion/>

⁴ <https://www.sermo.com/hcp-sentiment-study-series/>

⁵ <https://www.sermo.com/hcp-sentiment-study-series/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/new-government-recommendations-for-england-nhs-hospital-trusts-and-private-hospital-providers>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3879648/>

⁸ <https://www.the-hospitalist.org/hospitalist/article/221707/coronavirus-updates/doctor-mask-enhancing-communication-and-empathy>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7281887/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3879648/>