

# Recommendations for Senior Friendly Virtual Care



**Senior Friendly Care is proactive care.** Preparation is the key to creating a virtual care environment that is suitable for older adults with frailty. Consider the following recommendations as you develop and refine your virtual care processes.

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## **Ask about individual needs and preferences.**

- Inquire about the older adult's access to technology (internet, data plans, computer, laptop, headset, smartphone, hearing aids, or personal amplification device)
- Consider which virtual medium might be best for those who have hearing, visual, or cognitive impairments. (e.g., telephone-only can be challenging for those with hearing loss)
- Inquire about technology proficiency and allow the older adult to choose from the range of virtual care options you have available

## **Plan how to include family, significant others, or caregivers.**

- Inquire if the older adult has a caregiver and whether they would like to include them in the visit
- Ensure all older adults with cognitive impairments have a caregiver or family member present during the virtual visit
- Inquire about what equipment the family or caregiver has available and address any accommodations needed for them to attend the visit

## **Empower the older adult to use technology.**

- Offer the older adult and caregiver the ability to test the platform ahead of the appointment
- Allow the older adult and caregiver to ask questions about the platform ahead of the visit (e.g., use volunteer resources or link to free senior-specific technology support services)

## **Ensure equity and affordability.**

- Evaluate whether the requirements of your current virtual care processes might inadvertently exclude some older adults in your practice or catchment area (e.g. high bandwidth requirements, ease of access to platform).
- Consider how you might support older adults who do not have caregivers to participate in virtual care
- Consider whether you can provide the older adult with the equipment required to participate in virtual care (e.g., loaning technology equipment)

## **Provide key information ahead of the appointment.**

- Email or mail an introduction which includes your photo, job title, and your professional degree(s). This gesture can help facilitate trust by replacing the visual cues in your office.
- Describe the purpose of the visit and what will be discussed.
- Prepare the person if the provider is running late or provide a short window of time during when they can expect the appointment to begin. Try not to exceed 30 minutes of wait time.



## **Be sensitive to safety and privacy issues in a patient's physical environment.**

- Advise patient to have private space available for the appointment, if possible (e.g. a private room)
- Be mindful that it might be challenging for them to discuss private health concerns in public spaces (e.g., library or large household)
- Identify all parties participating in the virtual visit and their roles and responsibilities
- Give the older person the option of an in-person appointment if there are safety and/or privacy concerns

## **Optimize the platform ahead of the appointment.**

- Troubleshoot any technology issues ahead of time so that your full attention is on the older adult during the visit
- Ensure that you have tested your virtual care platform ahead of time and have a backup plan for any technical issues that arise
- Make sure you have adequate lighting on your face. Minimize shadows.
- Ensure that your audio and video quality is clear. Using a headset is best.
- Eliminate background noise

## **Create strategies to build rapport.**

- Thank the older adult for inviting you into their personal living space
- Prepare 1-2 standard questions that allow you to get to know your older adult patients.
- Have a brief script to introduce yourself.
- Set up the camera to align with your eye level so that the person feels you are making eye contact with them.

## **Communicate mindfully and clearly.**

- Speak slowly and clearly in a normal tone. Avoid using the higher register of your voice.
- Use your mouth to enunciate every word. This enables lip-reading for the hearing impaired and also mitigates any gaps in audio transmission.
- Be present. Create a brief ritual to focus your attention before a virtual visit.
- Use gestures to supplement your words
- Look for and respond to any cues the patient is not following the conversation (e.g. asking you to repeat questions; hearing words incorrectly; appearing confused, distracted, or frustrated)

## **Follow-up with key information after the appointment.**

- Ensure that the older person and their caregiver have understood and been provided with a record of the next steps (e.g., report or access to patient portal)
- Before closing the call, provide your name and contact information again and encourage them to call, if needed.
- Confirm the date of the next visit, so the patient doesn't have to follow-up.

## References

1. Tips You May Not Know to Improve Telehealth for Patients and Providers. (2020). [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.ihi.org/communities/blogs/tips-you-may-not-know-to-improve-telehealthforpatientsandproviders>
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## Acknowledgements

- We would like to acknowledge the contributions of older adults and caregivers and feedback from the Ontario Health Toronto Region Patient and Family Advisory Council that was instrumental in developing this document.