

10 April 2020

REF: Revision of funding for Tele-therapy

Dear Allied, Therapeutic and Psychology (AT&P) Practitioner

Since sharing Discovery Health's initial benefit regarding virtual therapy reimbursement last week, we have engaged extensively with the profession to understand and respond to questions raised about the details of the benefit. Based on these meaningful and constructive engagements, we have made adjustments to the benefit to align with the current and longer term demands for virtual therapy.

It is important to clarify that with the surge in queries regarding virtual therapy benefits in the unprecedented Covid-19 period, quick and responsive communication was important to address the issues that were being raised, which were further complicated by the absence of virtual therapy codes in any of the AT&P billing schedules. Our initial benefit aimed to enable continuity of care via digital channels, without any risk of misrepresenting the mode of care delivery through existing billing codes, which were developed for in-person, face-to-face therapy.

With immediate effect, Discovery Health will fund time based, tele-therapy consults at the full Discovery Health Rate as part of a defined quality improvement program developed collaboratively with the psychology representative societies.

It is crucial that virtual care be conducted through the highest standards, and that records are kept similar to what happens in practice. This aspect of care is especially relevant when such healthcare services are funded through scheme benefits. We have invested extraordinarily to build a virtual consult ecosystem that is amongst the best in the world, with the highest standards of care, as our commitment to those using the platform – members and healthcare professionals. The Discovery virtual consultation platform (DrConnect) is currently designed for doctors, but it is our intent to quickly scale the platform to Allied, Therapeutic and Psychology professionals. Once in place, safe and secure tele-therapy sessions will be funded at the DH Health rates if done through this platform, and will be applicable to all participating client medical schemes.

Until such time that the DrConnect platform is able to accommodate AT&P professionals, an interim solution will be implemented as follows:

- The tele-therapy interface that a practitioner chooses must be secure and private.
- Data transmission and storage must be compliant with protection of personal information regulations.
- Funding will be at the full Discovery Health rate for time based, tele-therapy codes only, as detailed in the discipline specific fee schedules:

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- Funding is from available day to day benefits.
  - Where applicable, funding for registered chronic conditions will be available from specified funding baskets.
  - Discipline specific fee schedules will be posted on the Discovery website by 15 April 2020.
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- Claim submission processes must include the newly created place of service indicator for telemedicine - 02.
    - Please consult your practice management application vendor for assistance with adding this requirement to your claims.
  - For the purpose of upholding the standards of care, the completion of a short verification form is required for all tele-therapy sessions that are claimed:
    - This form must be e-mailed to [AT&PVCONReports@discovery.co.za](mailto:AT&PVCONReports@discovery.co.za)
    - The form does not include the capture of any confidential information. The form is a brief record with a minimum level of information required to verify the therapy session.
  - In the weeks ahead, the verification form will be converted to a discipline specific quality improvement record and be incorporated into the DrConnect platform and process.
    - More information will follow as progress is made in providing access to the Dr Connect channel. At that point the interim e-mail channel will be closed.

We trust that these changes will support healthcare professionals in delivering care to patients during this stressful time, and post this period, will spur digital care strategies more widely.

We wish you strength in your personal and professional responsibilities at this time.

Sincerely,



Darren Sweidan  
Head: Health Professional Unit  
Strategic Risk Management  
Discovery Health