

Informed Consent for WhatsApp Consultation

Introduction

This document serves to inform you about the nature of the consultation you will be receiving via WhatsApp and to obtain your consent for proceeding with this mode of healthcare delivery. **It is important that you read this form carefully, and if you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask for clarification before proceeding.**

1. Nature of WhatsApp Consultation

WhatsApp consultations involve communication between you and your healthcare provider through text messages, voice notes, or video calls via the WhatsApp platform. This is a telehealth service, which means that the consultation may not take place in person but will occur remotely.

By participating in this consultation, you are agreeing to receive healthcare advice, diagnosis, or treatment recommendations through WhatsApp.

2. Purpose and Benefits

The purpose of this WhatsApp consultation is to provide you with timely healthcare services for the issues you are seeking assistance with. The benefits of using telehealth services include:

- Convenient access to healthcare from your location.
 - Increased availability of healthcare providers, especially for non-emergency consultations.
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3. Potential Risks and Limitations

While telehealth consultations offer many advantages, there are some risks and limitations associated with them:

- **Privacy and Confidentiality Risks:** Although WhatsApp employs end-to-end encryption, no communication system is 100% secure. The possibility of breaches in privacy exists. Your personal information, as defined under the **Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (POPIA)**, will be handled with the utmost care to ensure its confidentiality.
- **Limited Physical Examination:** A full physical examination may not be possible via WhatsApp. This could affect the accuracy of the diagnosis and treatment.
- **Technical Issues:** Connectivity problems, app malfunctions, or hardware failure can interrupt the consultation and affect the quality of care you receive.
- **Miscommunication:** Due to the nature of text and voice communication, misunderstandings may arise.

4. Consent for Use of WhatsApp

By consenting to this WhatsApp consultation, you acknowledge the following:

- You understand that this is a telehealth consultation and not an in-person appointment.
 - You consent to the use of WhatsApp for the purposes of this consultation, including communication of sensitive medical information.
 - You understand that the healthcare provider will make reasonable efforts to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of your consultation but cannot guarantee complete security.
 - In compliance with **POPIA**, your personal and health information will be collected, processed, and stored in accordance with legal requirements. You understand that your personal data may be used solely for the purpose of providing healthcare services to you.
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5. Financial Responsibility

You are responsible for any costs associated with this consultation, including:

- **Consultation Fees:** You will be charged for the consultation as per the healthcare provider's fee structure.

You agree to settle these costs.

6. Your Responsibilities

As a patient, you have certain responsibilities during a WhatsApp consultation:

- **Accuracy of Information:** You agree to provide accurate and honest information regarding your health, medical history, medications, and any other relevant information. This information will be collected and processed in line with the **Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)**, and will be kept confidential.
 - **Technical Requirements:** You are responsible for ensuring that you have a stable internet connection and a working device for the consultation.
 - **Follow-Up:** You agree to follow any instructions or advice given during the consultation and inform the healthcare provider of any changes in your condition.
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7. Emergency Situations

WhatsApp consultations are not suitable for emergency medical situations. If you experience a medical emergency, you should immediately contact emergency services or visit your nearest healthcare facility.

If your healthcare provider determines that your issue requires an in-person visit or further medical evaluation, they will inform you accordingly.

8. Alternatives to Telehealth

You have the right to opt for in-person healthcare services rather than a WhatsApp consultation. If you feel that telehealth is not appropriate for your healthcare needs, you can request an in-person appointment with the healthcare provider or seek an alternative provider who offers face-to-face consultations.

Your healthcare provider will explain whether an in-person visit is necessary or whether telehealth is appropriate for your condition.

9. Consent to Record Consultations

For quality assurance and clinical purposes, your consultation may be recorded (with your permission). If you do not wish for your consultation to be recorded, you have the right to decline.

Any recordings or other personal data collected during the consultation will be managed in compliance with the **Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)** and used solely for healthcare purposes.

10. Right to Withdraw Consent

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time, without it affecting your future access to healthcare services. If you choose to withdraw, the healthcare provider will advise you on alternative methods of care.

11. Acknowledgment and Consent

By agreeing to proceed with this WhatsApp consultation, you acknowledge that:

- You have read and understood the information provided in this consent form.
 - You have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and any queries you had have been addressed.
 - You voluntarily consent to the use of WhatsApp for your consultation.
 - You understand that you can withdraw consent at any time.
 - You acknowledge your financial responsibility for the consultation, including all associated costs.
 - You understand that your personal data, including health-related information, will be collected and processed in compliance with the **Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (POPIA)**.
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References:

- Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (POPIA). Available: www.gov.za
 - South African Medical Association (SAMA) Guidelines on Informed Consent. Available: www.samedical.org
 - Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) Informed Consent Booklet. Available: www.hpcsa.co.za
 - HPCSA Telehealth Guidelines. Available: www.hpcsa.co.za
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