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## Providing advice and medical services on-line or by telephone<sup>1</sup>

Giving advice by telephone is part of many doctors' day-to-day relationship with their patients. In some circumstances providing advice by telephone or computer link may be essential, for example, where patients are geographically isolated from their doctor.

However, the use of phone or e-mail should not diminish the quality of care patients receive. Consultations and prescribing by phone or e-mail may seriously compromise standards of care where:

- The patient is not previously known to the doctor, and
- No examination can be provided, and
- There is little or no provision for appropriate monitoring of the patient or follow-up care.

Doctors who wish to provide telephone or on-line services should consider carefully whether such a service will serve their patients' interests, and if necessary, seek advice from their professional association or medical defence society.

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