



23 April 2020

## **Virtual appointments ensure continuity of care during COVID-19 pandemic**

Thousands of outpatient appointments that would normally have been cancelled during the COVID-19 lockdown have been able to go ahead due to the use of digital technology.

Waitematā District Health Board has extended the rollout of its virtual appointment system via video to ensure patients continue to receive health advice to manage their conditions while they are unable to leave their household ‘bubble’.

Northland DHB is offering antenatal classes via video and is offering Facebook Live sessions to give expectant parents the chance to engage with others preparing for parenthood and to ask questions of health professionals.

Auckland and Counties Manukau DHBs are offering extended telephone consultations in place of the usual outpatient appointments to monitor patients with ongoing health needs.

“Patients appreciate the convenience of having a consultation from the comfort of their own homes, without needing to worry about transport, parking and finding their way,” said Waitematā DHB Chief Executive and Northern Region COVID-19 lead Dr Dale Bramley.

“In some services, such as diabetes, we have had amazing success, with a lower rate of cancellation than would normally be the case as our patients embrace the offer of appointments via Zoom and other digital platforms. More than 90 per cent of appointments in this service have gone ahead during lockdown and our diabetic patients have continued to receive the support they need to manage their condition effectively.

“The COVID pandemic has forced us to look at healthcare differently and we can already see it has offered us some important clues for how we should adapt in the future.

“While face-to-face appointments will always be important and these will continue to be available, it’s likely we will offer more digital or telehealth services where there is no actual need for the patient to come to hospital to meet face-to-face with a health professional.

“In many cases, a video consultation will enable the clinician to get a good understanding of the patient’s condition. It also offers the chance for the patient to look at their results on the screen while the doctor explains the information to them.

“Out of the adversity of COVID-19 and lockdown, we have made advances in the way we deliver healthcare that will shape our system for years to come.”

- Ends -

**Notes for editors**

Video resources, including an interview with Consultant Endocrinologist Dr Carl Peters, are available to download from Dropbox:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pn21oksin2qiyn6/AAAESTlsd3XkPnX0zoZ2Tqvja?dl=0>

The Northland and metro Auckland DHBs (Counties Manukau, Waitematā and Auckland DHBs) are operating a regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic through the Northern Region Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC).

**Media contact**

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