

17 July 2020

The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health

By email to: Minister.Hunt@health.gov.au

Dear Minister

Re: Telehealth for psychiatry inpatients

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the Department of Health's ongoing work to support the delivery of psychiatry services by telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the significant and continuing rise in the incidence of COVID-19 infections, particularly in Victoria, the RANZCP is writing to request your consideration of the urgent implementation of telehealth item numbers for the delivery of psychiatry inpatient services. We thank Professor Michael Kidd and Associate Professor Ruth Vine for making time to discuss this significant issue with our President-Elect Dr Vinay Lakra today.

The RANZCP requests that COVID-19 telehealth item numbers for in-hospital psychiatric services are introduced to mirror item numbers 297, 320, 322, 324, 326 and 328. The RANZCP strongly supports that enabling psychiatrists to attend consultations with hospital inpatients by telehealth will assist in preventing spread of COVID-19 between staff, patients and the broader community. This will also allow for continued service accessibility by allowing psychiatrists who may be required to self-isolate, or who reduce inpatient work due to risk of contracting COVID-19, to continue to provide care and treatment to their patients. This is particularly important in psychiatry where the continued therapeutic relationship between the psychiatrist and patient is crucial for safety and continuity of care.

We remain engaged with our membership to ensure appropriate use of the current telehealth item numbers. On introduction of these new items, we would continue to engage with our members to ensure appropriate use, including promoting the use of videoconferencing as the preferred method of communication. The RANZCP further supports that psychiatrists should continue to engage and provide clinical leadership to units within the multidisciplinary team when consulting via telehealth.

We have reattached our submission to the Department of Health's phase 5 consultation process which provides further rationale for the introduction of these items. We thank you for considering this issue, and for expediting this request given the escalating COVID-19 crisis.

For any queries on the points raised, please contact Rosie Forster, Executive Manager, Practice, Policy and Partnerships Department via rosie.forster@ranzcp.org or by phone on (03) 9601 4943.

Yours sincerely



Associate Professor John Allan
President

Ref: 1840

Cc:

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