

Do not forget your remote consultation!

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“It’s sad when patients fail to pick up the phone and we cannot give important information about their consultation. We ask people to be prepared for a call from the hospital and take into account that it may come from a number you are unfamiliar with. If you have booked a time for a consultation, you should be prepared for people trying to contact you via phone,” says East Tallinn Central Hospital Customer Service Manager Lea Karik. “We are having trouble with getting people to take our calls, meaning that we cannot schedule consultations.”

As of spring, the Estonian Health Insurance Fund has enabled the use of remote consultation in outpatient specialist treatment. Throughout this period, specialists and nurses and to some degree also support specialists such as activity therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists and psychologists have taken up this opportunity.

A remote consultation is an outpatient consultation without direct contact – it takes place through a secure IT solution. The health professional conducting the consultation shall decide whether a remote consultation is suitable for the particular patient. This saves the patient's time and reduces potential risk of infection.

"The health professional will determine, based on the patient's health records, whether remote consultation is an option or whether physical proximity is required," she explained. People are contacted in advance to agree on a remote consultation time.

Updating contact data is also necessary to make sure the remote consultation goes well. "If you have access to the internet, please review your contact details in the Patient Portal I-patient to make sure everything is correct: your phone number, email address," stressed Karik, specifying that a consent is required to receive reminders by text message.

"If there is no consent, we cannot send the reminder. It's also worthwhile to take a moment and focus on the content of the text message: are you being asked to come for an appointment or instructed to wait until you are contacted in the agreed manner. It's important that people do not come to the hospital if they are actually due to have a remote consultation. Remote consultations are always agreed in advance together with the people concerned, either during your previous consultation or over the phone," says Karik.

In four months, from mid July to mid November, East Tallinn Central Hospital performed over 11,000 remote consultations, constituting 8.7% of all outpatient consultations. During this period, remote consultations accounted for 79% of all outpatient consultations with specialists, with the largest number of consultations performed in endocrinology (57.8%) and consulting with nurses being most common in gynaecology (93.9%).