



Date: 20th March 2020

Circular Number: NCO-05-2020

Support for General Practitioner Services During Current National Public Health Emergency

Dear Doctor,

The Department of Health and the HSE held consultations recently with the IMO to discuss the impact of the emergence of the COVID-19 virus in Ireland on general practice and to discuss the ways in which general practice could be supported in its totality to maintain regular essential services as well as to assist in the efforts to combat COVID-19.

In this context, recognising that General Practitioner Services, in their totality, have a key role to play in our collective efforts to contain and mitigate the impact on public health during the current COVID-19 public health emergency, agreement has been reached with the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) on a number of General Practice oriented measures, the details of which are outlined hereunder; -

1. GPs will be remunerated for provision of remote consultations to patients who may have contracted COVID-19 infection including referral for testing if clinically required in line with the latest clinical algorithm which is available on www.hpsc.ie . A fee of €30 will be payable to GPs for provision of such remote consultations. **This fee will be payable in respect of all patients, regardless of eligibility status.** A claim is valid once a call has been completed whether or not the test is required. If a test is required the result will be referred back to GP and where a second remote consultation is required with the patient a further claim can be made. Claims can be submitted electronically to the HSE's PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. The code to be used for these claims is **CB**.
2. GPs will be enabled to provide dedicated respiratory clinics on their practice premises for patients previously identified by remote consultation as being at-risk of COVID-19 infection. A fee of €75 will be paid per consultation. **This fee will apply to all patients, regardless of eligibility status.** Claims can be submitted electronically to the HSE's PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. The code to be used for these claims is **CA**.
3. In order to maintain services for non-COVID-19 issues, a fee of €25 will be payable to GPs for a remote consultation, not related to COVID-19, with one of their patients to establish a need for attendance at the practice premises. **This fee will apply to a remote consultation with a holder of a Medical Card or GP Visit Card** and will apply whether or not the Out of Hours service is available, at the time the consultation is provided. Claims can be submitted electronically to the HSE's PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. The code to be used for these claims is **CD**.

4. Where a GP provides “extended day” consultations between the hours of 8am and 9am and for such consultations after 5pm the out of hours rate of €41.63 will apply. This applies whether or not the Out of Hours service is available at the time the “extended day” consultations are provided. **This fee will apply to consultations in person with holders of a Medical Card or GP Visit Card.** Claims can be submitted electronically to the PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. The STC code ‘H’ is to be used for these claims.

5. **Where a GP who holds a General Medical Service (GMS) contract with the HSE** (i.e. Medical Card, GP visit Card and/or Under 6 contract) is required to self-isolate he/she will be able to claim a contribution towards locum costs for the duration of the self-isolation period at a rate analogous to the daily rate currently in payment for maternity leave (i.e. €394.48). This locum contribution rate shall also apply to periods of COVID-19 related sick leave where a GMS GP has contracted the virus. Applications for locum expenses contribution will be processed through the Primary Care Units in the same way as other leave applications and will be reimbursed through the HSE’s Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCERS). GPs should use the current ALF/1 Form for this purpose and write ‘Covid19 leave’ on their ALF/1 Form and submit with usual supporting documentation to their local Primary Care Unit for approval. Once approved the application for reimbursement of locum costs should be forwarded to PCERS in accordance with current arrangements for locum expenses contribution claims. I should stress that these applications will be treated with the **strictest of confidentiality** by all HSE staff involved in the approval and reimbursement processes.

The arrangements set out in points 1 to 5 above have been agreed in the context of the current COVID-19 national public health emergency and will cease to apply when the emergency comes to an end. The fees will be subject to regular review with a view to amendment or cancellation in accordance with the status of the public health emergency and the demands placed on General Practitioners during the emergency, and will be reviewed in any case three months after they come into effect. All reviews will be conducted in consultation with the Department of Health, the HSE, and the IMO. These fee arrangements do not, and are not intended to, set a precedent in relation to remuneration of general practitioners for any service on behalf of the HSE.

It is agreed that following the introduction of these fees, General Practitioners will not make any charge on patients for any element of consultation, in person or remotely, relating to the diagnosis and/or treatment of COVID-19, where such diagnosis and/or treatment is clinically necessary.

GPs who do not hold a GMS or other health sector contract with the HSE may also claim these fees and should contact the HSE’s National Contracts Office at **044 9395519** or by email at **natcontractsoffice@hse.ie** for further information.

Given the exceptional circumstances arising from this public health emergency, and pending the drafting of the relevant Statutory Instrument to give effect to the fees referenced at (1) – (4) above, the HSE has put the necessary arrangements in place to apply these fees from Monday, 16th March 2020. The locum cover arrangement referred to at (5) above is also effective from 16th March, 2020.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to General Practitioners and their teams for their efforts to-date and for the patient centred approach in which they have organised their services in response to this public health emergency. It further reinforces the very high regard that General Practitioner services are already, justifiably, held in by their patients and the general public. I hope you and your teams stay safe and well during this period of enormous challenge for our health services and please be assured of the HSE's continued support at this time.

Yours sincerely,



**Pat Healy,
National Director
Community Strategy and Planning**