



## A National Doctor-based **COVID-19 Hotline**

**This is a call to all General Practitioners** who are in quarantine, lockdown or unable to see patients face to face. You can help us beat the pandemic, flatten the curve and reduce the strain on our healthcare system and most importantly our colleagues, without leaving your home.



**The Big idea:** *Rapid 24/7 telephonic access to Doctors, anytime, anywhere, on any phone, for all South Africans, for free.*

South Africa's healthcare facilities are at risk of not being able to serve the vast number of people descending on their doorsteps, resulting in overcrowding, delays, strained medical resources & staff and most importantly increased community transmission of COVID-19. A Tele-triage service could take the redundant percentage of patients (those who don't need to be there) out of the clinic and healthcare center queues and free up hospitals to treat only those who should be treated there.

The basis of the Tele triage solution is simply this: free personal access to a medical expert's opinion, anytime, anywhere - using technology that is readily available to all - the mobile phone.

### **A Simple Solution: USSD**

All South Africans would have access to a single, simple dedicated USSD number that launches with a COVID-19 risk assessment tool, the outcome of which triggers a Doctor Call Back request if needed. Within the hour, that request would be fulfilled by a doctor calling the patient back on their mobile phone, resulting in either resolution or referral.

- **Resolution:** the risk assessment is reviewed, a patient's queries are answered, reassurance is given, advice around COVID-19 prevention is shared and no visit to a clinic / facility is necessary
- **Referral:** If the risk assessment is verified based on the current NICD case definition for high risk individuals, patients can be referred to their nearest healthcare facility for further care.

**Note:** This solution is aimed at the lesser privileged communities within South Africa, and as such:

- requires **no airtime** at all, since the USSD session is reverse billed
- is **device agnostic** (works on any basic mobile phone)
- Completely **FREE** to the end user, meaning no-one is excluded on the basis of affordability.

### How can you help?

Firstly – just putting your hand up, saying I think I can help and would like to know more. The best way to do that would be an email to **michael@hellodoctor.com**

### What does this Tele-triage service practically entail?

Assuming you have online access, and a laptop / PC – you'd login securely to the Doctor Engagement portal, identify a patient from a list of call back requests and call the patient on their mobile phone using a VOIP service (voice over IP) and share relevant & appropriate health advice with the patient (all calls recorded). Then rinse & repeat as often as you can. It will take a few minutes training to get you up to speed, signed up and ready to handle a hotline.

### Medico-legally speaking?

You're not diagnosing or treating patients remotely; you're simply giving relevant and appropriate advice around COVID-19 and thereby adhering to current telehealth guidelines.

### In Closing ...

Triage is by far the most critical role in dealing with wartime casualties, and though we may not be "at war" yet – we soon could be. As doctors we get to be on the frontline, fighting for our fellow countrymen, so I'm asking you to stand up and be counted. We really need your help. You can make a significant difference from the confines of your home – so help us flatten the curve and reduce the devastating impact that Coronavirus disease could have on our country and its people.

As our president so eloquently said:

**"Now's the time to stand up and stand as one."**