

Prescribing for patients who are overseas

Most practices will have a number of patients travelling abroad at any point in time. Patients may contact their practice while overseas for a number of reasons, including to request a one-off repeat prescription that can be obtained locally. Such requests should be managed with caution.

Basic considerations

It is important to understand the risks associated with responding to requests for prescriptions or medical advice from patients who are outside the UK.

For patients requesting an acute prescription, it is very important to be aware that, along with the risks associated with not being able to examine them in order to make a proper diagnosis, there are increased risks associated with treating patients in other countries.

MDDUS is a UK-wide indemnity organisation and provides assistance to members for actions raised against them within the UK and does not provide indemnity for medical treatment where the patient is located outside the UK. Members would NOT be represented if action was taken against them in another country where harm had arisen as a result of their provision of medical advice.

Because of this, we would strongly advise members not to consult with a patient who is overseas. The patient should instead be encouraged to see a local medical practitioner.

Doctors should also consider:

- the need for additional indemnity cover
- whether registration with the national medical council is required in order to provide medical care/prescriptions.

Similarly, the GDC guidance on prescribing medicines states:

You must have an understanding of your patient's current health and medication, including any relevant medical history, in order to prescribe medicines safely.

You should only use remote means to prescribe medicines for dental patients if there is no other viable option and it is in their best interests.

It is important to consider:

- the limitations of the medium through which you are communicating with the patient
- the need for physical examination or other assessments
- whether you have access to the patient's medical records.

Common Pitfalls

- Agreeing to issue prescriptions to patients who are overseas without proper assessment, possibly including physical examination.
- Failing to appreciate that you will not normally be indemnified against any legal action taken against you that is instigated in a foreign country.
- Failure to consider differences in a product's licensed name, indications and recommended dosage regimen in foreign countries and jurisdictions.

Key points

- MDDUS will not normally assist members in legal action taken against them in another country where harm has arisen as a result of their provision of treatment.
- Always seek specific advice from MDDUS before agreeing to prescribe for a patient who is overseas and where there is a request to provide an extended prescription for travel abroad.

Further guidance

- GMC. *Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices* (Remote prescribing via telephone, video-link or online): <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/prescribing-and-managing-medicines-and-devices/remote-prescribing-via-telephone-video-link-or-online>
- MDDUS. *Advice to patients travelling overseas*: <https://www.mddus.com/resources/resource-library/risk-alerts/2014/august/advice-to-patients-travelling-overseas>
- Remote prescribing high level principles: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/learning-materials/remote-prescribing-high-level-principles>

MDDUS Training & CPD resources: <https://www.mddus.com/training-and-cpd/training-for-members>