

Standards of Practice

Electronic Practice (E-Practice)

For full statutes and regulations, see OAMHP's *Standards of Practice, section 10. Electronic Practice*: <https://oamhp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Standards-of-Practice-2019.pdf>

What is Electronic Practice?

Electronic practice is the delivery of mental health services (assessment, treatment, or other intervention) using electronic means rather than a standard in-person session. E-practice may be the sole means of contact with clients, or it may be used to support in-person mental health services. Delivery may be synchronous or asynchronous and provided by:

- Telephone or teleconferencing,
- E-mail,
- Text messaging,
- Internet-based voice, video, instant messaging, or videoconferencing, or
- Social media.

Regardless of the delivery method the same standards of practice and ethical guidelines should be observed as for in-person mental health services.

Special considerations connected with electronic practice:

1. Informed Consent and Contact Information

- a. When providing mental health services through electronic means to a client you have never met face-to-face, take all reasonable measures to make certain the person is representing themselves truthfully.
- b. Have potential clients confirm that they have read and understood consent to mental health services and have provided complete contact information.
- c. Ensure your client is old enough and has the capacity to consent to assessment or treatment.
- d. Discuss with the client the importance of accurately portraying themselves at all times.
- e. Make sure you know which issues, conditions, or disorders you have the capacity to assess or treat via electronic practice. If you cannot deliver the appropriate mental health service through electronic practice, you should inform the potential client of this and, whenever practical, suggest alternative appropriate services.
- f. Your clients need to know that you are not providing crisis counselling. As crises may arise, provide your client with clear directions as to how to connect with crisis services and make sure you have alternate means for contacting the client.
- g. If you are providing mental health services through electronic practice to clients outside your immediate geographical area, become familiar with the mental health and crisis intervention services available in the client's area and be prepared to connect clients with services in the client's area.

2. **Special Concerns Regarding Privacy**

- a. You are responsible for ensuring that privacy is maintained for clients.
- b. You need to take all reasonable measures to ensure that electronic communications are accessible only to them and the client. For example, electronic messages and transmissions should ideally be encrypted and password protected to reduce the possibility that transmissions might be “hacked” or accessed by someone other than members and their clients. Members should outline to clients how to enact encryption and password protection.
- c. If, for whatever reason, you do not use encryption or password protection, you must inform the client that these exchanges may not be secure.

3. **Jurisdictional Issues**

- a. You must not provide services to clients living within jurisdictions that require a license to practice, unless you have a license for that jurisdiction.

4. **Response Time and Appointment Times**

- a. When using asynchronous services (email/texting), you need to clearly convey to your clients the time frame within which a response may be expected, and let your clients know if and when you can be reached for synchronous communication if they would like a face-to-face appointment.

5. **Payment**

- a. Your clients need a secure and confidential means for making payments.
- b. It should be clear as to what your client is paying for and rates should be set before commencing services. For example, if a client is paying for telephone psychotherapy, fees should be established for a set time frame prior to the commencement of the telephone session. Similarly, if clients are receiving asynchronous e-mail responses, you should be clear as to how much time you will devote to responses and should establish a fee prior to delivering the service. Agreed upon fees should not be altered without prior consultation and agreement with the client.

6. **Record Keeping**

- a. All record keeping standards that pertain to in-person mental health services are the same when delivering electronic services. You still need your session notes along with billing records.

7. **Training**

- a. As electronic practice can present special challenges, do not try to engage in electronic practice without adequate training.

8. **Liability Insurance Issues**

- a. Make sure to discuss the policy regarding liability insurance for electronic practice with your insurance provider.

Resources:

- CRPO’s Standard of Practice for Electronic Practice: <https://www.crpo.ca/standard-3-4->

[electronic-practice/](#)

- CRPO's Electronic Practice Guidelines: <https://www.crpo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FINAL-Electronic-Practice-Guideline-approved-01MAR2019.pdf>
- For full details on OAMHP's Policies: <https://oamhp.ca/policies-resources/>