



iCons
in Medicine
Tele-Consult Handbook

A guide for iCons in Medicine Members participating
in iConsult, the Internet medical tele-consultations feature of
the iCons in Medicine program



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The Mission

The mission of International Consultations in Medicine (ICON) is to improve health care in medically underserved and remote areas by building global partnerships between health care providers in those regions to an international network of volunteer specialty physicians.

To accomplish this mission, ICON governs and operates the iCons in Medicine Program and its tele-consultation feature iConsult.

What is iConsult?

iConsult is an Internet-based medical tele-consultation service of the iCons in Medicine program. It combines a desktop software application with a website to enable health care professionals to collaborate on difficult medical cases at a distance.

How it works

- A request for a medical tele-consultation is made through the iConsult desktop software—an easy to download and install program that is designed to work effectively with even limited or unreliable Internet connectivity.
- A clinical history of a case (that can include digital images) is uploaded to the software and stored until Internet connectivity is available. A medical specialty from which advice is sought must be selected.
- Once Internet connectivity is obtained, the case is automatically submitted via the website.
- It is then routed, by the software consultant manager, to all Volunteers in that specialty.
- The Volunteers are notified that a request for consultation has been received.
- Once a Volunteer accepts the case, the two health care professionals can engage in a one-to-one dialogue via the iCons in Medicine website.
- The Volunteer consulting on the case uses the website's built-in communication tools to offer recommendations.
- All communications are encrypted and transmitted securely to ensure the confidentiality of clinical information.
- iCons in Medicine acts only as the messenger of requests for consultation and related documentation between the requestor and the volunteer.
- iCons in Medicine provides no clinical services and accepts no liability for medical decision-making based on recommendations provided by its volunteers.

Participants

Practitioner Members of iCons in Medicine may apply for participation in iConsult. There are two ways to participate in iConsult, as a Requestor or a Volunteer.

Requestor

A Requestor is an iCons in Medicine member who is a health care professional in a remote and medically underserved area in need of clinical advice on difficult cases. This individual is licensed or authorized in accordance with local laws and regulations as a health care professional for the role in which he/she seeks a request for a medical tele-consultation. He/she works for or is associated with a non-profit organization (e.g., hospital, clinic, or NGO) whose mission and activities are compatible with those of iCons in Medicine.

Volunteer

A Volunteer is an iCons in Medicine member who provides medical tele-consultations to health care providers in remote and underserved areas. This individual is licensed to practice medicine in a recognized iCons in Medicine health care specialty and is willing to provide at least three medical tele-consultations a year.

Services Provided

Health Care Offered Specialties

Health care specialties offered to Requestors for consultations are based upon a requisite number of Volunteers in a particular specialty.

The number required for each specialty may vary and is determined by ICON.

ICON recognizes the following as health care specialties based upon the American Board of Medical Specialties:

- Allergy and Immunology
- Nuclear Medicine
- Preventative Medicine
- Anesthesiology
- Obstetrics and Gynecology
- Psychiatry and Neurology
- Colon and Rectal Surgery
- Ophthalmology
- Radiology Dermatology
- Orthopaedic Surgery
- Emergency Medicine
- Otolaryngology

- Thoracic Surgery
- Family Medicine
- Pathology
- Urology
- Internal Medicine Pediatrics
- Medical Genetics
- Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
- Neurological Surgery
- Plastic Surgery

ICON may change or add to the specialties classified as Recognized Specialties. Additional specialties may be nominated for recognition by writing administrator@inconsinmed.org.

Requirements and Limitations

The following constitutes appropriate case requests:

1. Non-acute cases
2. Chronic disease that is not resolving, but not requiring immediate care

The following constitutes non-appropriate case requests:

1. Urgent/acute care situations
2. Cases with questionable ethics*

* Cases that may be construed as unethical will be reported to ICON.

The Medical Tele-Consultation Methodology

Initial Response Time for a Consult

The iConsult system cannot adequately address or respond within the time frame required for the treatment of emergency or life threatening conditions.

Once a request for a consult is submitted, it appears to Volunteers as a “Cases Awaiting Consult.”

A request will remain open for selection for a maximum of 48 hours after it is submitted by the Requestor. If at 48 hours the request has not been accepted, it is automatically removed from the “Cases Awaiting Consult” status and forwarded to a Coordinator who triages these requests. The Coordinator refers to a listserv of all Volunteers in the specialty being requested. These Volunteers are recontacted to accept the case. If no one accepts within 24 hours, the request is sent to two iCon Medical Directors within the specialty, one of whom

will accept the case on the same terms and conditions as would any volunteer. On a monthly basis, there is a rotation of two Medical Directors who are on call for such cases.

Accepted Consult Response Time

The Requestor receives an electronic notification that his/her request has been accepted by a Volunteer. This notification also includes the name of the Volunteer.

The Volunteer may take up to 48 hours after accepting the request, to provide an initial medical tele-consultation.

Continued correspondence and timing will depend on the complexity of the case and the availability of both the Requestor and the Volunteer.

Closing a Case

The Requestor is responsible for closing a case by marking it 'completed' from the cases menu.

Requesting a Second Opinion

Requestors can seek a second opinion from another Volunteer.

Liability and Insurance

Liability

The Requestor, as the health care professional of record, is solely responsible for patient care and accepts full liability in accordance with the following disclaimer:

"I represent and warrant that I am a physician or health care practitioner, licensed to practice medicine in my local jurisdiction and possess the licensure, skills and other qualifications necessary in my locale to render the professional care about which I am seeking advice. I understand that I am contacting an iCons in Medicine Volunteer to act as a consultant only, and to provide his or her knowledge and expertise to me such that I am better able to render patient care. I acknowledge and agree that the iCons in Medicine Volunteer is limited in his or her ability to provide accurate advice based on the information I provide, and in providing any advice shall incur no liability for the outcome of any care I provide. I further acknowledge and agree that the iCons in Medicine Volunteer will have no contact with my patient and any advice rendered by such physician/health care practitioner shall not be construed to establish a patient care relationship between the iCons in Medicine physician/health care provider and my patient."

This disclaimer must be accepted as part of the enrollment process in becoming a Requestor.

There is no guarantee of the accuracy or timeliness of information available through the iCons in Medicine program or that it will be regularly available on a 24 hour, seven days a week basis or otherwise operate without interruption or error.

Any medical advice provided by a volunteer through the iCons in Medicine program and all content or tele-consultations received through it are not a substitute for the professional judgment of health care providers in diagnosing and treating patients.

Insurance

If you are enrolling in the iConsult program via the organization in which you are employed/affiliated, you should obtain any leadership sign off as necessary regarding the membership agreement and its impact on your malpractice insurance prior to participating. This is recommended for both Requestors and Volunteers. Volunteers should make sure that their insurance carrier knows of their participation.

ICON does not provide insurance coverage to any participants.

Volunteer-to-Patient Relationship

The Volunteer is serving as a source of knowledge, and therefore, the Volunteer's relationship is not with the patient. There is no implied or actual relationship established between the Volunteer and the patient who is obtaining advice through the Requestor. All volunteer interaction is to be maintained directly with the Requestor who is seeking advice on a particularly complex case on behalf of the patient. It is the decision of the Requestor as to how to assimilate any advice provided by a volunteer and to decide how it best serves the patient at the point of service. The Requestor will filter information accordingly and may even seek the opinion of a second volunteer or other specialist. There must be no contact and/or communication between Volunteer and the patient in accordance with the following disclaimer:

"I represent and warrant that I am a physician or health care practitioner, licensed to practice medicine in my local jurisdiction and possess the licensure, skills and other qualifications necessary in my locale to render the professional care about which I am providing advice. I understand that I am being contacted as an iCons in Medicine Volunteer to act as a consultant only, and to provide knowledge and expertise to the requesting health care provider in order to assist that individual in rendering improved patient care. I acknowledge and agree that as an iCons in Medicine Volunteer I will have no contact with any patients associated with the Requestor and that any advice I render shall not be construed to establish a physician-patient relationship with the requesting health care provider's patient."

This disclaimer must be accepted as part of the enrollment process in becoming a Volunteer.

Privacy and Security

Patient Privacy

To the extent required by local laws, cases are to be entered without personally identifiable patient information and are to be transmitted through the iConsult secure website.

Case information should be handled in the same manner as any other medical record, and participating Requestors should take care to protect patient privacy. We encourage Requestors to become familiar with local and national statutes that cover the communication of personal health information and to obtain any consent necessary from their patients, in the manner prescribed by local and national regulations, before sharing any information that may be privileged or protected by law.

In the event that such information should be sent or received, legal requirements covering the communication of patient information vary by jurisdiction. In the United States, the Privacy Requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the federal privacy law governing the use and disclosure of personal health information, generally permit the free exchange of health information among health care providers for treatment purposes. With respect to HIPAA, iConsult is acting only as a conduit for the transmission of such data and not as a business associate.

Please note HIPAA acts only as a "floor" with respect to privacy regulation. Thus, if a local jurisdiction has adopted a law governing the privacy of health care information that is more stringent than HIPAA, then that more stringent law will govern. Note that many jurisdictions have adopted more stringent privacy laws relating to what is commonly termed "sensitive personal information," which may include, for example, information pertaining to HIV status, mental health status or genetic testing information. You are responsible for complying with the privacy law requirements applicable to your jurisdiction, including obtaining any necessary consents or authorizations from patients, before communicating any health information that may be privileged or protected by law.

Retention of Records

Images and related documentation will be retained by the iCons in Medicine Program for no more than 30 days after the close of an iConsult tele-consultation. If records will be needed beyond that point, it is the responsibility of the Volunteer or Requestor needing the documentation to download and maintain the files. iCons in Medicine assumes no responsibility for record retention or for making information available outside of the system.

Prohibited Website Actions

Prohibited actions are listed and defined in the Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), which sets forth the principles that govern the use by Members of the Web-based products and services provided by iCons in Medicine. This AUP is designed to help protect Members and the Internet community from irresponsible, abusive or illegal activities.

All enrolling members must read and agree with the published AUP prior to membership authorization.

Prohibition on Charging Fees

As a condition of participating in the iConsult program, no requestor or volunteer may require patients or their families to pay or promise to pay or charge any type of fee.

Cultural Perspectives

There are numerous links on the Internet that open doors to be better understanding of cultures beyond one's own. It is highly recommended that Members of the iCons of Medicine take this opportunity to engage in informal interactions, networking and experiences to further develop cross culture skills.

All medical tele-consultations shall be conducted in a manner consistent with the ethical principles of the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Medical Association.

The iCons in Medicine program is based on a self-governed exchange of knowledge. The content of a response to a request for a medical tele-consultation shall not imply anything negative about another individual's culture or background.

Languages

The official language of iCons in Medicine is English. Submitting a request in languages other than English may result in a smaller pool of responding Volunteers. Volunteers should respond to requests only in languages in which they are proficient.

iCon Advisory Board

The iCon Advisory Board is responsible for addressing the procedures for adopting and modifying the ICON Medical Handbook and the timetable for reviewing and adopting proposed amendments to it.