



Online medical consultations vague, may cause complications, says KMC

There's A Need To Frame Rules, Suggests Council

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Bengaluru: Online medical consultations could end up compromising patients' safety, the Karnataka Medical Council (KMC) has warned.

The practice may result in complications, which is nothing but playing with patients' lives, the council said while responding to a query raised by the Bangalore Dermatological Society (BDS). Calling the consultations vague as they are done without the doctor physically seeing the patient, the council added they don't feature in medical ethics.

Observing the trend of an increasing number of platforms offering services to patients by hiring doctors for online consultations, more so in dermatology, BDS wrote to KMC seeking clarity on such

'DOC MUST TREAT PATIENT IN PERSON'

Dr Jagadish P, secretary, BDS, said online consultations can be misleading, as in some cases, the way a person talks or walks can also help in diagnosis.

"Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland does not produce enough hormones to meet the body's needs. It leads to dryness of skin. Tone changes and slurred speech can also be seen. For example, if leprosy occurs due to neurological effects, the patient's movement is affected as well," said Dr Jagadish, stressing that a patient must be seen by the doctor before treatment is advised.



consultations and to know whether the practice is approved by the council.

"In many cases, doctors have also been asked to share patients' data with such forums, which is nothing but a

breach of privacy. Some firms offer medicines at a lower cost to patients as part of their business model," said Dr Raghunath Reddy, president, BDS.

Seeking information on the code of ethics, if any, to be

TIMES VIEW

The mushrooming of online platforms offering a plethora of medical services and drugs, often at discounted rates, has triggered the ethics debate and raised questions of efficacy, privacy and patients' well-being. Virtual consultations are not entirely without benefits — they cut down waiting time and make patients feel more at ease — but many experts still vouch for the old-school practice of face-to-face interactions, which may give the doctor a better shot at identifying the ailment. With people increasingly turning to such portals to save time, there's a need for a regulatory mechanism to prevent complications and safeguard patients' interests. While awareness should be created among the medical fraternity, patients must exercise due diligence.

followed during online consultations, BDS had raised queries with the council in June 2018 and received replies on May 4, 2019.

"It's cardinal that online consultations don't feature in

the code of ethics for the reason that doctors necessarily need to see patients physically and treat them clinically, which is missing in the process of such consultations," reads the KMC reply to the dermatological society. Such consultations certainly fall in the ambit of consumer fora, due to which the doctors concerned become directly responsible in case anything goes wrong with patients' health, the council opined.

Dr Veerabhadrapa H, president, KMC said the council is concerned about the increasing number of companies functioning as portals to facilitate online interactions between doctors and patients.

"Currently, there are no rules in KMC for online consultations. We need to frame them. With advancements in technology, doctors are likely to adopt the easier method of online consultations, and KMC needs to conduct regular workshops to educate doctors in this regard," the council said.