

## Administrator

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**Forrest**  
Medico-Legal Services



## MLR assessments using video or teleconferencing software

In light of the current Covid-19 situation and observing the current guidance that ‘Everyone must stay at home to help stop the spread of coronavirus’ (except for ‘absolutely necessary’ work)<sup>1</sup>, Forrest recommend suspending face-to-face appointments until further notice.

Forrest will seek to maintain a viable MLR service during this period and to produce reports which, in the absence of a face-to-face interview, may not be fully Istanbul Protocol compliant, but will nonetheless **identify** the core clinical issues, describe physical and psychological sequelae, and, to the extent possible, document them.

These reports will be described as ‘Interim’ (as referred to in the Home Office’s [Asylum Policy Instruction](#), p.9-10) and, when face-to-face interviews become practical again, the necessity of addenda to these reports will be reviewed. It **may** be that not all reports will require an addendum. We will likely request an update on the case from the lawyer and the legal representative will be notified in writing accordingly of whether in our view an addendum is necessary.

In **order** to carry out the assessments described above the following conditions should be in place:

1. Forrest has advised all of its members to follow government advice mentioned above (and obviously to isolate if they or those they live with have symptoms).
2. Appointments conducted remotely will only be possible if your client has access to the technology described below. Forrest is not able to provide access to this.
3. The legal representative should ensure that their client has access to:
  - A private space, Internet access, and
  - WhatsApp (preferred for the time being because of its availability and ease of use) on a smartphone or other device with a camera for the assessment appointment slot.
  - If there is a preference for an alternative app, for example use of Skype, Zoom or Facetime, then the legal representative should let Forrest know as soon as possible. If an MLR writer requests the use of an alternative app Forrest will let the legal representative know as soon as possible.

The legal representative should inform Forrest of what the plan is for the assessment well in advance. Forrest is aware that many asylum seekers have their own smartphone and that others are using a friend’s phone/Internet. However, self-isolation, distancing and hygiene routines compliant with current guidelines/legislation apply to the above.

4. On a case-by-case basis Forrest will seek to arrange an interpreter to be available via a three-way call. We may also ask the legal representative to make the arrangements for an interpreter in some circumstances. Please note that Forrest cannot guarantee arrangements for an interpreter in all cases.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> [accessed 23 March 2020]



5. Where the instructions to Forrest include instructions to assess physical injuries, the legal representative must set out all physical injuries of which the client is aware. Staff at Forrest will decide whether in the circumstances the physical assessment should be put on hold and a psychiatric/psychological only assessment be undertaken or whether an interim full MLR would be appropriate.
6. If an assessment of physical injuries is planned then the legal representative, in advance of the assessment appointment, will need to ask their client to take photographs of the injuries of which they are aware.
7. Only digital copies of these photographs (with the meta-data intact showing when and potentially where the picture was taken) must be provided – we cannot accept paper copies or other electronic versions without the meta data.
8. In the event of technical problems during the assessment appointment, Forrest and our MLR writer will try to be flexible (e.g. advising people to move nearer a router or to carrying out the assessment by audio only. Such audio/telephone assessments would clearly have to be seen as interim).
9. If there are more substantive problems (e.g. issues with rapport and disclosure) arising because of the means of communication which suggest that it is clinically inappropriate to continue, then we will terminate the appointment and prepare a (necessarily briefer) MLR explaining the issues which prevented the assessment from continuing.
10. If, despite all efforts, it turns out the report cannot be accomplished remotely, we will still invoice for the preparatory work done (reading papers, preparatory steps towards the assessment etc.) and will provide a breakdown of that work for the Legal Aid Agency.
11. A form of words explaining the processes adopted in the above circumstances will be incorporated into the MLR.
12. Clarifications etc. will be dealt with as usual, but your forbearance is requested. MLRs produced at this time will be necessarily restricted and only information which is strictly clinically relevant will appear in the MLRs.
13. MLRs may not mirror previous statements etc made to others exactly. Such apparent inconsistencies are particularly likely to be present where MLRs are conducted in the constrained manner described above. The wording of the reports will clarify this matter for the reader.