

The Project Surgery online consultations case study

Size: **5,000**

Region: **London**

Geography: **urban**

Supplier: **EMIS Health**

Model: **single handed practice**

The idea

To improve patient access and satisfaction while managing clinician's time more effectively.

The problem

The Project Surgery sits within Newham CCG, which is generally regarded as a deprived area, where patients struggle to access a GP in a timeframe that suits them. The practice had already made progress in tackling this problem with the introduction of a telephone triage service six years ago, allowing for more patients to have telephone appointments and reducing waiting times, but more needed to be done to keep up with the growing demand.

The solution

The surgery asked Newham CCG if they could participate in the online consultations pilot being run across the borough.

The model: Online Consult is a system that supports one-way messaging between patients and the surgery. It also allows patients to access self-help advice in both written and video format.

"I wanted to continue to make further improvements and online consultations seemed like the best option to not only give patients more choice, but it was an opportunity to do things differently".

Dr Hussain,
GP partner

Implementation

To identify the challenges being faced by the practice and to ensure that any changes implemented would address these, Dr Hussain developed a business case to gain insight into the benefits of online consultations – such as time saving and opportunities for clinicians to work remotely. This was then shared with all members of the practice team who were receptive to the idea, especially the reception staff who recognised that online consultations could reduce waiting times on the phone and lead to an increase in patient satisfaction.

By February 2019 the practice was ready to



The Project Surgery

10 Lettsom Walk, London, E13 0LN

Contact your doctor online and get health advice

Please enter your main symptom e.g. headache, sore throat...



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introduce online consultations through a phased approach, allowing them to gradually move demand away from telephone and face-to-face consultations. This approach was chosen to ensure practice staff felt confident in completing an online consultation and to not overwhelm patients with a new way of working.

The practice therefore agreed a target of changing four of its 20 telephone appointment slots to online consultations in the beginning. After six months this would be increased further, with 25 online consultations replacing the telephone appointments. This shift from telephone appointments to online consults means the practice will have the capacity to assist an additional five patients in a single session. To support this, the administrative team will undertake additional training before taking responsibility for fit-notes and blood test results.

The challenge: Patients at The Project Surgery speak over 26 different languages, with many having English as a second language. Concerns were raised that patients

wouldn't be able to complete an online consultation due to low literacy levels, limited English, or both.

The solution: Online consultations were monitored very closely, and feedback was obtained from patients after that had used the service to ensure that no patient group was negatively impacted upon. However, rather than having a negative effect, online consultations was having a positive effect, and language was proving to not be a barrier. Instead, patients were able to take their own time, felt less pressured (compared to a telephone consultation) and could request the help of a friend or family member to complete the online form.

Training: EMIS Health delivered two types of training for staff at The Project Surgery. To begin with Dr Hussain completed an online demonstration to become familiar with the system before attending a one-day training session alongside Sanita Basi, the practice manager. Dr Hussain and Sanita were then able to train other members of staff at the practice and disseminate the learning.

Additionally, the surgery had on-going support from the CCG, who were always available to provide advice and guidance.

Promotion: Staff were keen to ensure that promotion was tailored to patients and the benefits they would receive from completing an online consultation. Therefore, before promotion began staff considered what the patient key messages should focus on, and what aspect of online consultations patients would find most beneficial. Because of this - and knowing the access and waiting times were key pain points - promotion focused on response times, with online consultations offering a two-hour response time during opening hours.

The practice also raised awareness using both digital and printed promotional material - such as through their website, displays within the waiting area and when speaking to patients over the telephone.

Post-implementation

System Functionality: Patients access an online consultation either through the practice website or by signing into their existing Patient Access account.

Online Triage works through a one-way messaging system. Patients enter their main symptom and, with the use of an algorithm, are directed to either contact the practice through an online form or to self-care advice where appropriate. Patients who contact the practice will receive a follow-up response via SMS text, email or telephone depending on the next step required – for example, if the history is not clear the clinician will telephone the patient.

Impact

The implementation of Online Consult at The Project Surgery is still in its early days. However, Dr Hussain and her colleagues are keen to monitor the success of it within the practice through monitoring how many consultations submitted online are then also closed remotely – since this will have a direct impact on managing clinician's time more effectively.

Anecdotal evidence however shows that staff and patients are already starting to benefit within the first 12 weeks of online consultations being implemented. Practice staff are saving time as patient queries are being directed to the right person the first-time round. There is scope for financial savings as well, the practice have calculated that if 10% of appointments shifted to online consultations it would reduce one GP session a week. This would result in a saving



of approximately £10,000 a year, which can be reinvested in supporting patients with long-term conditions and other patient services.

Patients are also not witnessing any adverse effects regarding patient safety due to a robust process which sees clinicians manage the online consultation workflows and the responses to patients. In fact, patients have been making a point to come and speak to the practice team about how impressive the service is.

“I have never had better access than this.”

Patient at The Project Surgery

Want to know more?

Dr Farzana Hussain, GP partner and Sanita Basi, practice manager, are happy to be contacted by other practices to share their learning from implementing online consultations and answer any questions related to their experience.

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Sanita Basi: s.basi@nhs.net

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying an online consultation form. The form is titled 'Summary' and contains the following sections:

- Red flags:** Drowsiness/reduced LOC, Seizure, SOB, Heavy bleeding, Chest pain, Anaphylaxis/severe allergic reaction, Burns or scalds, MI/CVA concern, Significant trauma. A checkbox labeled 'None of the above' is checked.
- Reason for contact:** I had IBF treatment 3 moths before . Since my my last eggs collection i feel severe pain after passing urin.it on my left side near to my kidneys .
- Length of symptoms:** Having unbearable pain after urin
- self care already tried:** All counter line medication . Even strong codeine .
- What do you hope to receive from us?:** My bladder to be checked and urin test . I am sure after egg collection the amntibitic did not cure me properly
- Times unavailable by phone in next 2 working days:** My work number number other wise my mobile
- Satisfaction score (1-5):** 1

The form is displayed on a page titled 'Page: 1 of 2' with 'Annotations: 0'. At the bottom right, there are buttons for 'Send', 'Export', 'Print All', and 'Close'.

Screen shot showing an online consultation from a test patient.