Online GP consultation services

Online consultation services can help GPs manage patient demand, and offer new, more accessible alternatives to face-to-face appointments.

eConsult has been developed by the Hurley Group of GP practices.

Benefits of eConsult

How it works

1. The patient completes a simple form about their issue.
2. The system helps the patient find the appropriate outcome and sends the data to the GP.
3. The patient gets advice from the system, a prescription, or an appointment.

Services provided

- Self-help
- GP access
- IT clinician
- Symptom checker
- Pharmacy advice
- Test results

User profile

- 66% aged 25-44
- 65% Female
- 35% Male
- 78% in employment

Positive outcomes

The number of mental health conditions diagnosed has increased since eConsult was introduced.

- 702 Anxiety
- 393 Depression
- 241 Somatic

User poll

- 49% used the service as an alternative to a face-to-face appointment
- 75% used the service to request feedback on new and ongoing conditions

Patient experience

- 75% would use the service again
- 80% would use the service to face-to-face appointments
- 64% said eConsult saved them time

In the same amount of time a GP would normally see one patient, they can process three e-consults.

Benefits for the NHS

1. Improved identification of conditions.
2. Enhanced access to primary care reduces impact on other NHS services.
3. Service efficiencies including financial benefits for practices.

Benefits for patients

1. Easier access to services.
2. Improved experience.
3. Promotes independence and encourages self-management.
4. Has potential to identify conditions earlier.
5. Has potential to enable easier disclosure of sensitive conditions or services.

Recommendations for implementation

1. Practices should establish a clear process for responding to patients following their initial contact, and this should be agreed and tested rigorously prior to go-live.
2. In support of the above, training and development activity with practice staff should highlight the importance of having an agreed patient call-back protocol.
3. To gain full benefit practices should engage with their patients to optimise the implementation and supporting workflows.
4. Given the importance of contributing to the overall ‘business case’ for the use of this kind of digital health technology within the NHS, GP practices using online GP consultation services should routinely examine their return on investment.