



## 2 New consultation types

## E-consultations

### Online consultations, Rydal practice, N London

As one of the first practices to use the askmyGP system, Rydal practice in North London has seen over 40% of patient demand move online in three months.

#### The idea

At this 12,500 patient practice in North London, patients are offered the opportunity to consult the GP, pass messages or send queries via a web-based portal. The askmyGP system provides a series of boxes for entering details, as well as more detailed questions about specific issues where appropriate.

Information submitted by patients is received in reception and directed to the appropriate member of the team, whether that is a receptionist, a member of the clerical team or a clinician. If the patient has sent a clinical query, they are able to state whether they have a preference for a specific clinician.

Clinical queries are passed to the GP, who chooses how best to handle it. GPs have time set aside throughout their clinics to enable them to deal with online consultations quickly. This has allowed them to respond in a mean of 23 minutes.

#### Impact

Usage by patients grew rapidly. In the first 9 months, there were 12,066 online contacts. By the end of the first four months, 45% of phone consultation demand had moved online. Face to face consultations reduced by 25%, and total demand was unchanged.

Although the majority of consultations (82%) are during core hours, there is less of a surge at the beginning of the day. Consultations have been submitted for patients from 0 to 102 years of age, with a younger overall age profile than the overall patient population but a similar bias towards consultations from female patients.

Approximately a quarter of contacts are for non-clinical queries, which are dealt with staff other than a GP. In 83% of clinical queries, the patient asks for any GP, 27% a named GP. 13% of clinical queries were for more than one problem. 50% of consultations are for a new problem.

Online consultations are quicker for the GP. It takes an average of 1 minute for the GP to decide whether the patient is best being seen in person. 35% of online consultations are 'converted' in this way to a face-to-face contact. The GPs report these consultations are often more satisfactory because the patient has already provided information about their problem, often together with their ideas, concerns and expectations.

Online consultations are received well by the patients who use the system. Over 1000 comments have been left by patients. 92% say the new system is as good as or better than the previous one, nearly two thirds of these saying it is an improvement. 80% of users would recommend the system to other patients. A common observation is that it is easier to discuss some symptoms and conditions online, including mental health and sexual health concerns. Patients who work have also said that they have fewer concerns regarding confidentiality with the online system than phone consulting because they are less likely to be overheard.

#### Implementation tips

It is worth using a variety of means to inform patients about the availability of the online consultation system. Common approaches include providing information on the practice answerphone system, encouraging receptionists and clinicians to recommend the system directly and designing the front page of the website so that the online consultation option is prominent and easy to access.

Setting aside slots during surgeries for GPs to deal with online consultations allows patients to receive a more rapid response, and reduces inconvenience or safety risks for the 35% of patients asked to make a face to face appointment.

Patients differ in their preference for how much detail they want to give. It is worth considering ways in which the online consultation can adapt to the specific needs of your patients.

**Link(s)**

[gpaccess.uk/evidence/askmygp-pilot-study-30-demand-moves-online/](https://gpaccess.uk/evidence/askmygp-pilot-study-30-demand-moves-online/)