

**PATIENT ONLINE
SAFE ACCESS TO ONLINE
RECORDS CASE STUDY**



HOW TO PROMOTE

ONLINE GP SERVICES

TO PATIENTS

“Tell your patients about it at a time they need it.” This is how staff at the Lighthouse Medical Practice in Eastbourne promote online services to patients. “And get your patient forum involved, that makes a massive difference too.”



Over 3,500 of the 14,500 patients at the Lighthouse Medical Practice have signed up for online GP services. “We’ve been signing up people since the beginning,” GP Tim says. “The practice has a strong tradition of helping people access their records and being IT savvy.” Long before online GP services made their introduction, the practice was already preparing patients for a digital future. “We were thinking that the future would be all about online services and about 8 years ago, we started collecting people’s e-mail addresses,” says Amanda, practice manager. “When online services became available, we had a large electronic database ready to inform our patients.”

Over the years, the practice has promoted online GP services in many different ways. These include posters in the waiting room, messages on the signage board, via e-mail and on the website, with a message on paper prescriptions, at the bottom of letters, and in the patient forum newsletter (more about this later).

Share the care

“Medicine has traditionally been quite hierarchal, with the GP telling the patient what to do,” Tim says. “Online services are revolutionary in concept as they empower patients. They can now find out information



about their health themselves. It's about sharing the care." To make sure everybody at the practice was on board, staff had meetings and training sessions. "You have to believe in online services as a practice, and it will shine through to your patients," Tim explains.

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To encourage staff to sign up patients for online services, the practice started a competition. "The admin that comes with registering patients can be seen as a drudge. That's why we offered a bottle of champagne to the staff member who signed up the most patients in one month," Tim says. "In the last month we consented and verified the identity for 162 patients. The colleague who won the competition signed up 20 of them."

Embed online services in everything you do

"It's important to promote online services to your patients and embed it in everything you do, rather than just letting them happen," Tim says. "At the practice we follow the nudge theory ¹ EAST, which stands for easy, attractive, social and timely."

Easy: Try to make online GP services as easy as possible for your patients

The Lighthouse Medical Practice's website has a direct link to online services. Nominated staff are able to vouch for patients if appropriate, which makes it easier as they don't have to take their ID with them to register for online services.

Attractive: Tell your patients about the benefits

Staff tell patients that they can order repeat prescriptions and view their test results at home or even from their smartphone. "When you make people aware of the benefits, many of them are eager to sign up."

¹ Nudge theory is the belief that people are more likely to do something when they are gently encouraged rather than being forced or instructed. For more info, see <http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/>



Social: Let your patients know that lots of people are doing it

“Nobody wants to be a pioneer or guinea pig.” By telling your patients how many others are doing it, they will be tempted to sign up as well.

Timely: Tell patients about it when they need it

When patients call to find out their test results or order repeat prescriptions, staff at the Lighthouse Medical Practice will tell them they can do all this online, without having to contact the practice. Patients who show up at the reception desk with the same questions can take home a letter explaining how to sign up for online services.

Involve your patient forum

The Lighthouse Medical Practice has an active patient and virtual forum of about 40 members. “They meet regularly and are involved in absolutely everything we do,” Amanda says. “We discuss what’s going on at the practice and within the NHS, talk about online GP services, research topics for the newsletter and a lot more.”

The patient forum members all have access to online services and were the first to use them. “Our patient forum often trials something for us and we introduced them to online services a few years ago. We explained what it was all about, asked them to try it and to let us know how it feels to use online services,” Amanda says. “Their feedback was used in articles to introduce and promote online services to other patients in the patient forum newsletter.”

This quarterly newsletter is a popular one. Its latest edition was downloaded over 4,000 times and about 1,000 copies were printed. To cover the cost, the practice asked the local pharmacy to sponsor the newsletter. “For the past 3 years, we’ve always had several articles about online services in every issue,” Amanda says. Topics have included: ‘How to view your medical records online’ and ‘Letting patients know they can book their appointments online’.

“Find out why people are not using online services, this will help you with the promotion”



The patient forum is also in charge of running the annual patient survey. To get as many completed surveys as possible, they set up in the waiting room and ask patients to complete the survey. "It's an excellent opportunity to talk about online services as well," says Liz, vice chair of the patient forum. "Amongst other questions, this year's survey wants to know why people are not using online services. The feedback to this question will help us with how we communicate about online services."

Liz recently created a Lighthouse Medical Practice patient forum Facebook page to keep patients informed of what's going on at the practice. "We're promoting online services this way as well," she says. "It's the perfect place for it, as people clicking on our page are already online. We can guide them to more information and answer their questions."

About the practice

The Lighthouse Medical is a large practice in Eastbourne with two sites. 12 GPs look after 14,500 patients, split almost equally across both sites. Every week, the practice signs up about 20 patients to online services. The numbers are steadily going up.