

NEW WAYS TO WORK IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Workplace changes benefit all

Active signposting

AT Medics has introduced new systems to work more efficiently with staff, patients and hospital correspondence. These workplace systems save time, free up appointments and enable clinicians to focus on their patients. Each of the new systems can be taken on board by GP practices like yours – here’s how AT Medics achieved it, including step-by-step tips for you to follow. One of the key innovations introduced at AT Medics is active signposting.

AT Medics is a GP led primary care provider with 26 GP surgeries, serving 140,000 patients across 13 Clinical Commissioning Groups in London and Surrey. AT Medics also manages Urgent Care services including Minor Injuries Units and a Walk-in Centre.

“Our overarching goal is to make it as easy and straightforward as possible for our patients to access quality healthcare,” explains Susan Sinclair, Chief Executive Officer of AT Medics. “In order to achieve this goal, we are constantly innovating and finding new ways to work. These innovations have delivered direct savings for us rather than costs,” she explains.

AT Medics aim to allow all of their GPs to work to the top of their licenses, focusing more of their

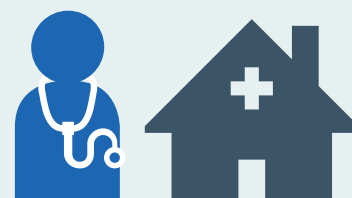
time on doing the things only they can do. They have introduced a number of innovations to meet this aim, ensuring that all innovations are standardised and easily replicable across all of their practices.

“We didn’t use any external contractors or receive any external funding to help us introduce these innovations – we used entirely our own workforce to bring about these changes,” adds Susan. “AT Medics is run by six GP directors, all of whom are practicing GPs in our surgeries. This means that they have first-hand experience of day-to-day general practice and can assess for themselves which processes are inefficient and need to be changed. We involve all levels of staff in innovations from the very beginning.”

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Chief Executive Officer of AT Medics

AT MEDICS



26

GP SURGERIES



140,000

PATIENTS

CCGs

13

CLINICAL
COMMISSIONING
GROUPS

ACTIVE SIGNPOSTING

Empowering patients & freeing up appointments

Receptionists at AT Medics have taken a more active role in patient care, reducing overwhelming demand for GP appointments.

The demand for GP appointments at all of AT Medics' 26 surgeries is extremely high. Before the introduction of active signposting, reception staff would take a call from a patient asking for an appointment and book them into an available slot without question. This meant that the surgeries were overloaded with completely full calendars, often for weeks in advance.

“Ultimately, we can provide a service to more patients than before, without having to increase our number of GPs.”

Katie Rack,
Practice Manager
at Edith Cavell Surgery

One incident in particular acted as a catalyst for change. “One day we had a fully booked clinic and were extremely busy,” explains Katie Rack, Practice Manager at Edith Cavell Surgery, one of AT Medics' South London practices. “A parent with a very sick child phoned

up desperate for an emergency appointment that day. We made the decision to squeeze their appointment in as it was urgent, but it got us thinking – how could we have avoided that happening?”

The clinical and administrative team at the Edith Cavell surgery looked back through all the appointments for the day's clinic and realised that there were a lot of patients who had come in to see a GP who could have been helped in a different way. “We estimated that about 60% of patients coming in to see a GP didn't need to, and could have been signposted to a different service instead,” notes Katie.

The team decided to test signposting to see if they could successfully solve some patients' problems before they came in to see a doctor, thereby freeing up their appointment slot. Patients who could see a different clinician, a pharmacist or be signposted to another service altogether were proactively identified and contacted with information about how they could avoid having to come and see their GP by following a different route.

“For example, we had a lot of patients booking GP appointments

to get a prescription for medication,” explains Katie. “We spoke to these patients and let them know that they could order a prescription on our website, and successfully freed up their appointment slots. Other examples of the types of appointment that we can free up through signposting include patients who want a repeated sick note, who are collecting test results, or those who want to be prescribed contraception.”

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Training staff

Once the system had been tested, an AT Medics' GP director developed a protocol flowchart. This flowchart clearly and easily laid out how to signpost patients properly, in a format that was easy for a receptionist to follow when on the phone to a patient.

It was made clear to the receptionists that they could ask GPs or practice managers any questions they had to help them understand the new system completely. Initial questions answered, the receptionists then began to practise the system in their day-to-day work. The flowchart allows AT Medics to easily train new staff to use the process.

Weekly staff meetings are held to review appointments which have taken place and to see whether a patient could have been successfully signposted elsewhere. Staff can learn from these meetings and discuss what could have been done differently. AT Medics also operate a peer-to-peer monitoring approach, encouraging staff members to feedback on calls they overhear, suggesting how the person handling

the call could have signposted the patient differently. This approach allows more experienced members of staff to impart their knowledge to newer staff, and allows newer staff to learn as they work. It has also created a collaborative and 'can do' culture among reception staff, allowing them to take greater responsibility for continually improving their work.



Optimising websites

A key part of signposting at AT Medics is each practice's website, which have each been developed to incorporate a host of online services. Patients can create an online patient account via their practice's website, which they can then use to book and cancel appointments, request repeat prescriptions, view test results, message their GPs directly and even access their medical records.

"If a patient phones and asks to book an appointment for a repeat prescription, we would signpost them to our website and let them know that they can order it online



"Accessing your bank account or gas bill online is simple, quick and easy – why should healthcare be any different?"

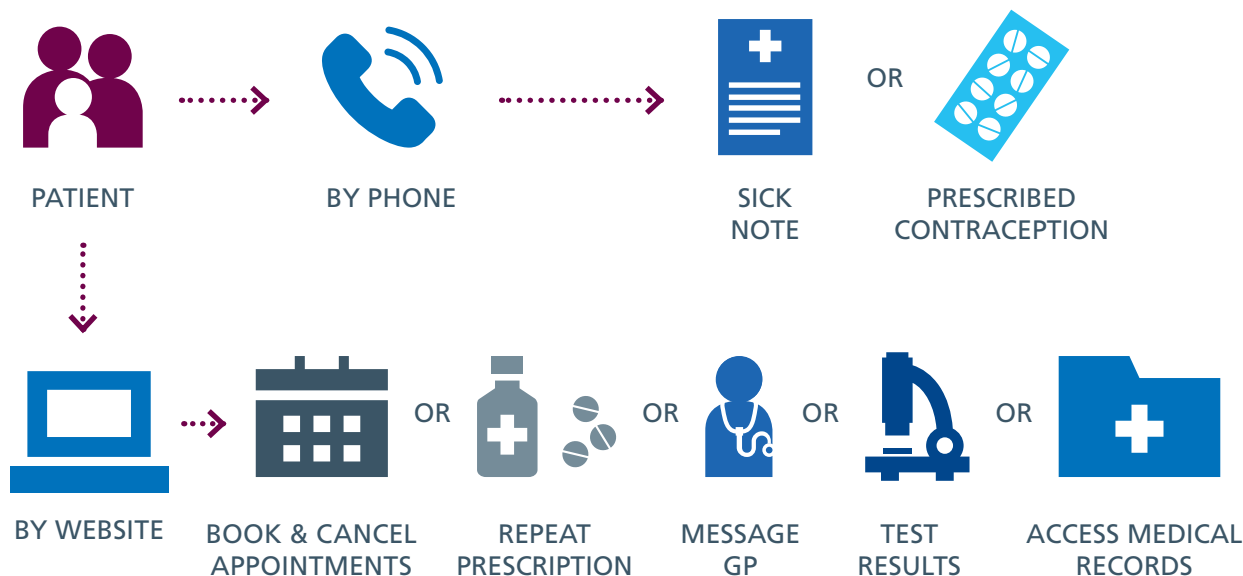
Susan Sinclair, CEO

without needing to come in," explains Katie.

"We also proactively tell patients about our website when they phone or come in for an appointment, so that we can raise greater awareness of the online services we offer."

Their online services and active signposting protocol allows AT Medics to meet their goal of making accessing quality healthcare as easy as possible for their patients. "Accessing your bank account or gas bill online is simple, quick and easy – why should healthcare be any different?" Susan Sinclair, CEO, points out.

ACTIVE SIGNPOSTING



84%

of patients at AT Medics' Streatham High Surgery describe their experience of making an appointment as good – compared to the local CCG average of 71%.

Gathering feedback

The signposting protocol allows receptionists at AT Medics to take a more active role in patient care. "Feedback from reception staff on signposting has been overwhelmingly positive," Katie notes. "They feel more empowered and have a higher level of job satisfaction, because they have a hand in getting the patient the care they need."

Patients have also responded well to the change, with signposting allowing them to access the right healthcare for their needs much more quickly than before. "A lot of the time, patients don't want to come in to see a GP if they don't have to, so when they get signposted elsewhere they're very happy about it," adds Katie.

In order to signpost a patient successfully, a receptionist will need to know the reason for the patient's appointment. Staff were trained to understand that patients may feel uncomfortable about being asked to give medical details to a receptionist, and how to deal with this situation. Staff reassure patients that they are asking in order to find the most appropriate care for them and to get them seen as quickly as possible.

"Patients are usually very responsive to this," explains Katie. "Occasionally a patient just won't want to give the information to the receptionist and that's fine too – in these cases we will go ahead and book the appointment. But most of our patients have got used to the change and are fine with telling receptionists the reason for needing an appointment.

"We have many more appointments available now than we did before signposting was introduced, allowing GPs to only see patients that they need to. This has also allowed us to grow our practices, meaning that more people in our locality can benefit from our services than before; we don't have to turn patients away because we're full up. Ultimately, we can provide a service to more patients than before, without having to increase our number of GPs."

"I have just recently signed up to the online services offered by my surgery and I have to say they are fantastic! I ordered my repeat medications using my online account and could then check my account to see when it had been processed. I didn't need to go to the surgery to collect the prescription as it had been sent straight to my pharmacy. One word: Efficiency! Well done!"

Patient

BOOKABLE APPOINTMENTS PER WEEK



239

IMPROVEMENT IN NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS DUE TO SIGNPOSTING



25%

OF APPOINTMENTS FREED UP



33%

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF BOOKABLE APPOINTMENTS PER WEEK

ACTIVE SIGNPOSTING

Step-by-step

1 Audit your appointments over the course of a clinic. Assess the various scenarios where a patient might not need to see a GP, and how many appointments you could have saved as a result of this.

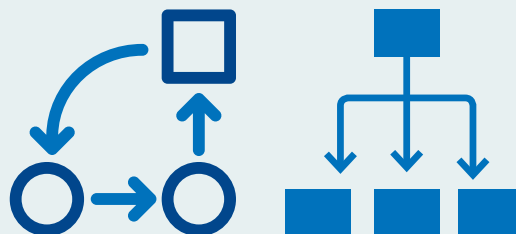


2 Get admin staff involved from the very beginning; explain your findings to them and explain that a new system could result in freeing up appointments for those who really need one.



DISCUSS AND EXPLAIN

3 Create clear, simple protocols to follow – something visual like a flowchart works well and means staff can easily learn and refer back to it.



PROTOCOL

FLOW CHARTS

4 Get staff to practise and learn as they work; make sure they know they can ask you any questions or concerns they might have.



TRAINING

ASK

5 Continuously monitor, evaluate and gather feedback on how the process is working, and involve staff in improving it themselves.



EVALUATE

INVOLVE STAFF