Practice guidance
5 Minute Guide
Offering 25% of appointments online

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Introduction

Commitment

From April 2019, practices must offer patients a minimum of 25% of all appointments online.

This can be made up of GP appointments, all nurse appointments, appointments with other practice staff, etc. Appointments made available online to NHS 111 will also be included.

Practices differ in how they manage their appointment books, however there are very few that are not suitable or adaptable for online.

GMS Contract 2019-20

5.10 NHS England and GPC England have agreed eight specific improvements, backed by agreed contract changes, in areas where it is realistic to make early progress, given available functionality

iv.   at least 25% of appointments are available for online booking

Online appointment types can include

- All GP appointments – planned and same day

- Telephone triage and care navigation appointments can be enabled for a patient to book into in advance online

- All nursing appointments – e.g. with practice nurses, nurse practitioners, health care assistants

- All other appointments that are available for practice staff to book patients into – e.g. physiotherapy, midwife, occupational therapy

What to consider

- There is a lot of evidence from recent data collections to suggest that the Practice Baseline Appointment Data tool (total number of patient facing appointments) is reporting a higher number of appointments than what the practices are actually offering. This subsequently calculates a lower percentage of online appointments than what is offered.

- Configuration hints and tips are included on the following pages. These will help practices to ensure that their total figure for all appointments is more accurate and ensure that the percentage of online appointments can be calculated more accurately.

- For practices using an online consultation system to triage most/all patient contacts, please see our FAQ here

Configuration - hints and tips

Only appointments that are patient bookable need to be counted, therefore ensure:

Only patient facing appointments are marked as bookable

- The system default is to make all appointments bookable during set up.

- When required, appointments can be changed to unbookable during setup. However, this is frequently overlooked.

- If appointments such as admin meeting, fridge temperature checks etc. are not changed to unbookable, they may be included in your practices baseline total.

Health Care Professional (HCP) leavers

- Ensure that leavers are updated as such on the clinical system as soon as possible. Any open calendars with appointments sessions/slots will be included in the baseline figure.

Duplication of appointment slots

- Where a practice is running triage appointments, the patients may be booked directly into a triage appointment (triage column) rather than allocated to a named HCP appointment.

- However, to ensure that HCPs are available, appointment slots may have been included in their own appointment calendar.

- If the HCP appointment is bookable it results in duplicate appointment slots.

- Should this happen, the appointments in the HCP calendars should be set as unbookable, as the practice is using them as placeholder and not booking into those appointments.

Archived slots

- Archive unused appointment slot types. At any time in the future these can be unarchived.

Opening up appointments for booking online

Each practice is different, and the type of appointments released may differ

Begin a staged approach

- For example, initially enable: cervical screening and contraception appointments.

- Practices who have already done this have reported they have not had any issues.

- There is also evidence that practices who have enabled cervical smear appointments online are benefitting from gaining more QOF points, as well as identifying a life-threatening disease early.

Extend the number and type of appointments

- Future plans should include a wider range of appointments to be enabled for online following the success of the first tranche, for example blood tests, holiday vaccinations, health checks etc.

- Practices using SystmOne can also enable untimed appointments (lists) for online access.

Other steps

- Think carefully about **naming conventions.** Ensure that these are understandable to the patients to reduce the risk of incorrect booking. For example, use "blood tests" instead of "phlebotomy". The NHS App website includes [guidance on amending appointment names and naming conventions](#).

- Use a test patient to check and understand what patients will see.

- If you use an automated telephone booking, e.g. Babble Voice - consider releasing these appointments online too.

- Make use of local IT support and clinical guides.

Further information

Practice GP workload tool – appointments dashboards

Most clinical systems have GP workload tool. They incorporate an appointments dashboard, which can be used to understand how appointments are utilised.

This information does not identify the number of online appointments, but it can help to identify inconsistency of appointments configuration.

Appointments dashboard system setup guides

NHS Digital have published simple guides on how to use the General Practice Appointments Dashboard (also known as the GP Workload Tool). For EMIS, System One and Informatica Front Desk the tool is built into the system, for Vision the tool must be downloaded from the hive.

Click here to access the latest guides for EMIS, TPP, Vision, Microtest Health, and Informatica.

Case studies

- There are useful guides/case studies available regarding enabling flu clinic appointments for online booking; cervical smear appointment guidance will follow:

- www.england.nhs.uk/gp-online-services/support/support-resource-guides/

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