

Witley Surgery online consultations case study

Size: 11,118
Region: south
Geography: rural
Deprivation score: 10
Supplier: eConsult
Model: federation

The idea

To implement a new service to boost patient access and satisfaction while reducing the burden on GP's time.

The problem

Around two-years ago Dr Triska learned that a senior partner at Witley Surgery was going to retire, resulting in the loss of six partner sessions. This prompted him to explore options to boost patient access and satisfaction without adding to the GP burden.

Ideally, the solution would also help to free-up GP's time.

The solution

Reaching out to Guildford & Waverley CCG, Dr Triska joined the Surrey Heartlands online consultations pilot, alongside four other practices. Having trialled eConsult for a year the practice wanted to build upon the learning and changes in patient behaviour that they were witnessing. Therefore, following thorough research of different online consultation models and products available, Dr Triska decided to trial a telephone and online consultation model developed by askmyGP.

The model: askmyGP is a telephone and online consultation product that enables two-way messaging between patients and the surgery. It also supports telephone, email, video and face-to-face consultations.



Implementation

The challenge: At the beginning of the journey there was some reluctance from staff to embrace this new way of working.

“The senior partner was very sceptical at first, but now praises the system”.

Dr Triska, GP

The solution: Dr Triska and the team at Witley Surgery wanted to get a better understanding of how their patients might respond to alternative consultations, such as a telephone consultation. The reception team agreed to ask every patient: *“Would you like to come in for an appointment or would you prefer to have one over the phone?”* The team found that the concept of having a telephone appointment wasn't as daunting for patients as initially feared - with around four in five patients saying that they would prefer a phone appointment.

Dr Triska used this evidence to have more detailed conversations about implementing a full online and telephone consultation model at the surgery.

Training: Witley Surgery staff have access to an askmyGP web information package that is regularly refreshed, easily accessible at any time and includes training materials. They also received remote training, which staff said suited them well, along with continuing support via a web chat feature with the supplier. Reception staff also received a safety training package especially for their role, which was designed by askmyGP and delivered by the

practice. The safety training covered how to recognise red flags and the patients whom the practice needs to follow-up more closely due to concerns or serious illness. Witley Surgery also received an appointment structure from the supplier to help them implement askmyGP and integrate it with their other practice processes. This, in conjunction with the demand and capacity modelling they undertook, supported them in determining how many online consultations and other appointment types to expect and allowed them to adjust their appointment structure to match.

Promotion: Following their initial patient research - asking patients if they would prefer a telephone or face-to-face appointment - and after discussions with all members of staff, the surgery decided to inform their patient participation group (PPG) group about online consultations before going live with a 'big bang' approach to implementing askmyGP. This approach was selected as it was felt that pre-loading patient with information could make them anxious and worried about upcoming changes.

Reception staff were key to promoting the new service and ensuring that patients understood that the introduction of an online consultation system was to provide patients with better access, rather than create a barrier between them and clinical staff. Therefore, reception staff started to promote the service when speaking to patients over the phone, or at the surgery, and by helping patients through the sign-up process.

The surgery's telephone message was updated to inform callers *“the quickest way for*

us to help patients, parents or carers is through our new service – askmyGP. Help us to treat you quickly, and beat the phone queue, by going to our website and clicking

Post-implementation

It took around two years to embed askmyGP at Witley Surgery and to get the system fully up-and-running with patients. For some patients, such as children under two years old and some elderly patients, they are classed as ‘gold’ patients where the receptionist allows them to bypass the booking system and book straight in with the clinician. This bypass system was introduced following discussions with the PPG as they were concerned some patients may be disadvantaged by an online system.

As of August 2019, over 9,700 of the 11,000 patients registered at Witley Surgery have signed-up to use askmyGP. These patients benefit from faster access to their GP. They can make an enquiry through the website or over the phone, receiving an automatic message explaining that that they will receive a response by the end of the next working day, though this often happens much faster, with the median time to completing a patient’s request standing at 71 minutes.

All these enquiries are received by the reception staff who either refer it to member of the general practice team for clinical triage, or deal with it directly. The outcome of an enquiry might end in the provision of information, advice or appropriate treatment from a health professional at the surgery or an appointment in the form of a consultation over the phone, by email or face-to-face.

EMIS workflow is used by the reception staff to manage these consultations.

Source of demand
Online via patient: 47%
Online via carer or parent: 13%
Telephone: 40%

Averaged data from 25 March – 13 May 2019

Before askmyGP was implemented, patients could only access an appointment by phoning or visiting the reception desk, or by using the online system to book one of the limited appointments that had been made available for online booking that week.

“It has been a slow process to get fully established with running online consultations, but 55% of our appointments at Witley Surgery are now through askmyGP.”

Dr Triska, GP



Patient books appointment via phone or online.



Patient waits to see GP on specified date

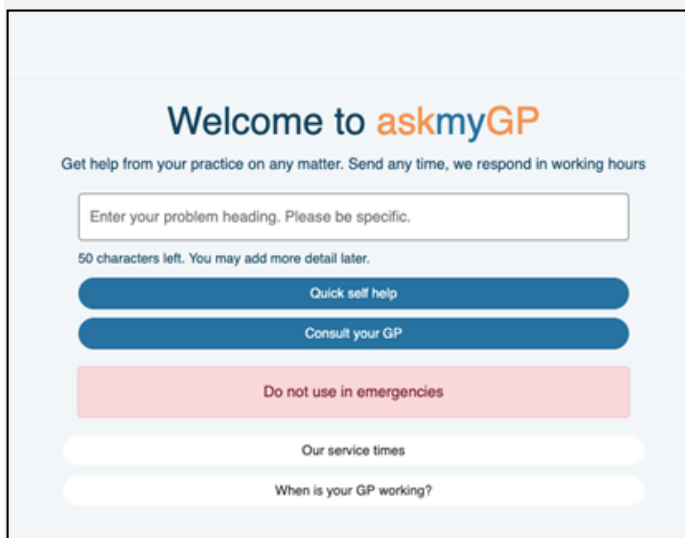


Patient travels to surgery for appointment

System functionality: To use the system for the first time, each patient needs to create an account by giving their name, date of birth, address and contact details. Carers and patients can also register through proxy access. The practice will then verify each account.

askmyGP works through a two-way messaging system. The system can deliver both instant messages – or issue a delayed message. A delayed message enables staff to request a message/consultation to be sent at a later date – for example enabling staff to pre-arrange a medications review. Patients have reported that these messages feel like a more personal approach from the doctor or the practice.

The system also enables patients to upload photos to support their telephone or online consultation. Video consultations are also available and there is currently a 0.5% uptake.



The screenshot shows the 'Welcome to askmyGP' interface. At the top, it says 'Welcome to askmyGP' in blue and orange. Below that, it says 'Get help from your practice on any matter. Send any time, we respond in working hours'. There is a text input field with the placeholder 'Enter your problem heading. Please be specific.' and a character count '50 characters left. You may add more detail later.' Below the input field are three buttons: 'Quick self help' (blue), 'Consult your GP' (blue), and 'Do not use in emergencies' (pink). At the bottom, there are two links: 'Our service times' and 'When is your GP working?'.

Impact

The implementation of askmyGP has been hugely successful for both staff and patients of Witley Surgery. Uptake was extremely rapid, the surgery reports that on the first day of

using the telephone message, 30% of their appointments shifted to an online consultation. A report run by Witley Surgery over a two-week period showed that the number of people contacting the surgery through askmyGP had increased. However, the number of face-to-face consultations had reduced by 43% and home visits had reduced by 73%, which overall lead to a decrease in waiting times for patients. Further insights show that patients are benefiting positively from the shift in consultation type, with 93% of patients who provided feedback in May 2019 rating the new system as 'better'.

There has been a decrease in footfall within the practice, as patients are accessing the online service and being contacted remotely, minimising the need for them to visit the practice unnecessarily. Additionally, Dr Triska says there has also been a large drop in ambulances being called out to take patients who had deteriorated during the day to hospital, as the practice now has advance notification of a patient's symptoms and can triage them appropriately.

The surgery team made extra efforts to make patients with mental health needs aware of the system, as they believed that these patients would really benefit from online access. Feedback from these patients indicates that they have found the remote system beneficial and that they are happy to touch base with the practice every so often through an online consultation. Furthermore, when they do make contact patients with mental health needs have provided much richer histories online, making management more effective.

Data from the system has enabled the surgery to identify peaks in demand for consultations – supporting staff to shift the supply to match the demand pattern. GPs report that this is the main benefit from their perspective enabling them to control their day and give the right care at the right time. Witley Surgery also reports that GP’s now usually go home on time. These changes have improved the experience and satisfaction levels of the GPs which has led to happy staff and happy patients. Staff are fully enjoying the positive outcomes associated with the changes, for example, two GPs now work remotely. Patients have reported that they are happy with how quickly they can get an appointment if needed. They feel the online system has saved them travelling to the practice unnecessarily and feel they are able to get a more personalised touch than before.

Some patient feedback includes:

“I have found this service to be extremely helpful. To be able to have a telephone consultation, saved time having to have an appointment. I think this service is valuable to all”.

“Excellent. Received a call shortly after I made my request and had a very quick and effective

consultation over the phone. Will use again”.

“Although a call back service may not appeal to all, it has been a turning point in helping those like myself, with a weakened immune system or cancer”.

Want to know more?

Dr Triska is happy to be contacted by other practices to share his learning from implementing online consultations and answer any questions related to their experience.

Dr David Triska: david.triska@nhs.net



Shift of demand from morning to afternoon



Chart showing the number of consulting hours and the number of consultations in June 2017 compared to June 2018. There has been a reduction in 40 consulting hours over this period, but an additional 400 consultations took place.

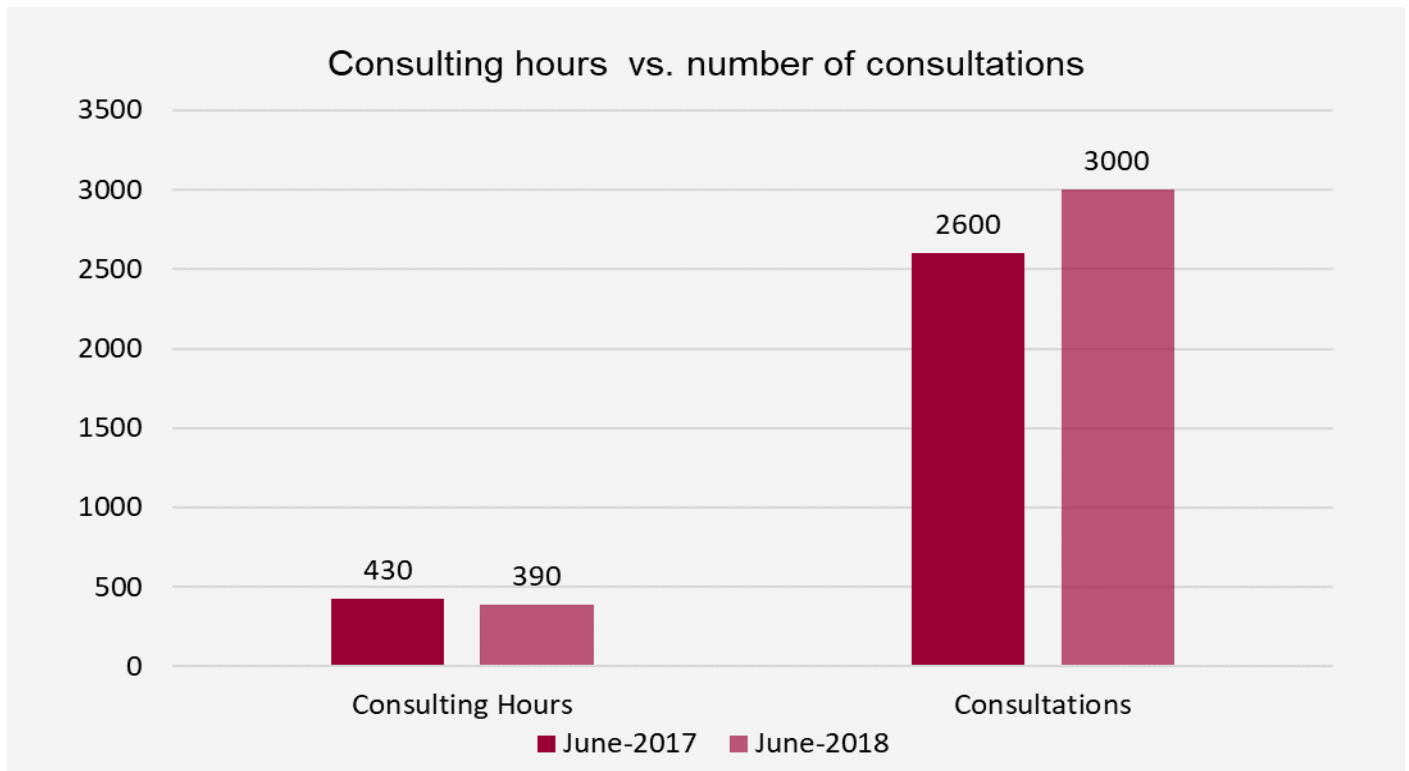


Chart showing the different types of consultations over an eight week period from March to May 2019 and the percentage of the final type of consultation taking place with a patient.

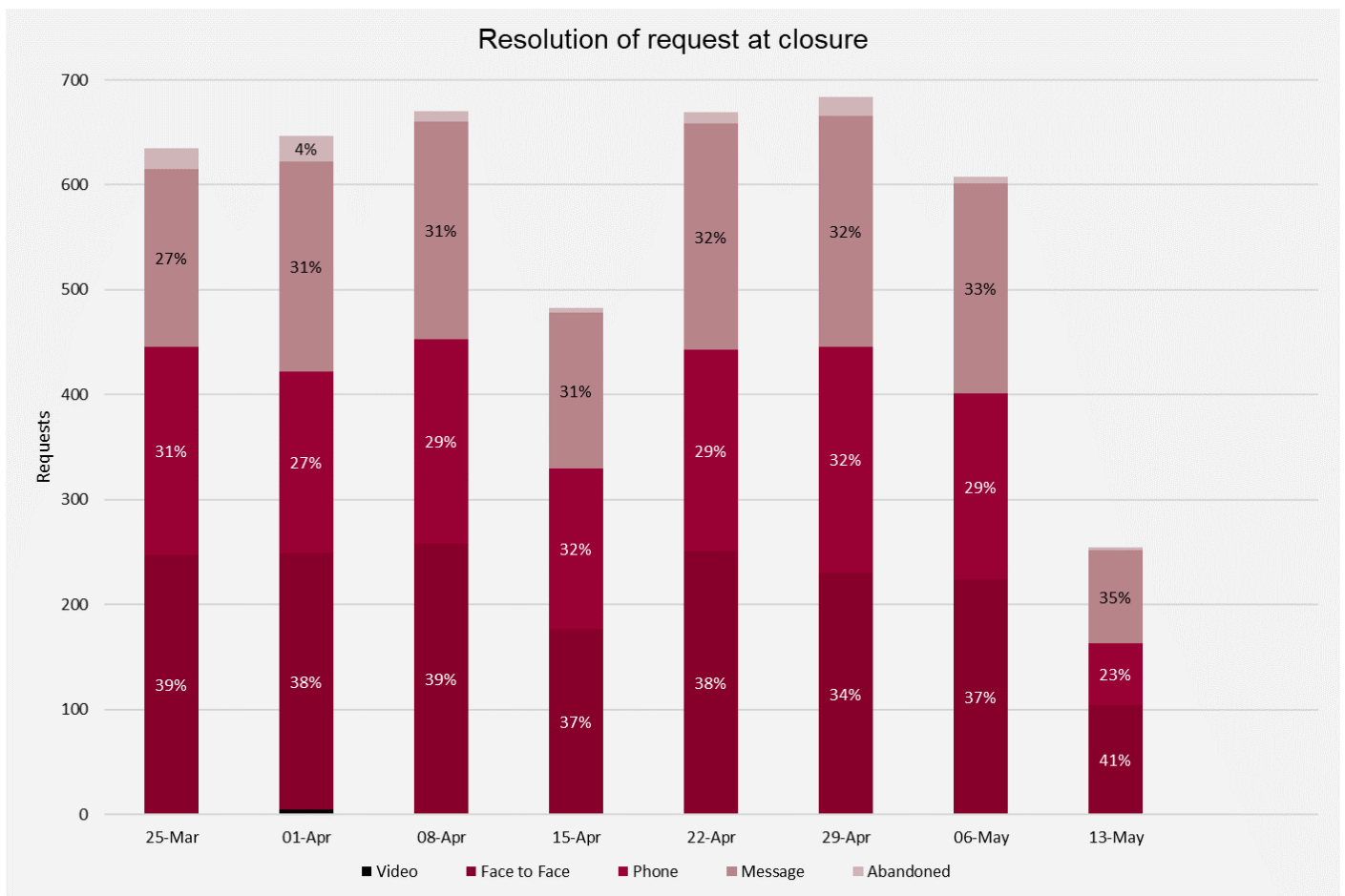


Chart showing the continuity of care patients received when asking for a specific member of staff, based on when patients stated a preference and chose a named member of staff over a period from March to May 2019.

