



Enhancing patient engagement and improving face to face consultations

Enhancing patient engagement

Digital communication can be used to reach out in a non-threatening way to patients who have disengaged from a service.

" We had someone recently who hadn't responded to any automatic DNA letters from clinic, so we just dropped her an email saying, 'not heard from you for a bit, is everything okay, can we do anything, do you need anything?' And she emailed us back so it was quite successful. "

Physiotherapist

Many patients are more likely to email or text to get in touch rather than telephone, particularly those considered hard to reach patients and those with communication difficulties.

" Unless patients know me very well, they don't ever call. So I think it does definitely help the relationship overall. "

Psychologist

The use of less formal and non-clinical language can help engagement.

Patients' feelings of control and empowerment can be enhanced so they actively manage their condition.

" It gives me more individuality because I'm able to know myself what to do and what not to do... if I call I can tell them that I don't feel well, this is what I'm doing, is this okay? And they will advise me on what to do. "

Patient

" There were a few emails where he described what his symptoms were and we asked him a few more questions. He responded to those. We gave him some advice about his medication, we told him we'd contact the GP to prescribe the medication and could he pick it up from the surgery. And then he said, 'oh I've done this, I'm feeling better.' "

Nurse Specialist

" They probably wouldn't call or turn up but they might email and say, 'I can't come or I haven't come', or 'I've run out of medicine', or 'can you organise this for me?' So it's that first rung on the ladder of self-management. We can then help them think about what they would like to do next. "

Psychologist

Patient activation can be enhanced through having confidence in their health professionals.

" It's knowing that I can contact her easily and that she's so nice about it all the time, she'll always send a really friendly reply. I think I have a lot more trust in her, I feel quite confident in her care. "

Patient

Improving face to face consultations

Patients with difficult issues to discuss value being able to do so by text before a face to face meeting.

" They can bring it up instead of you bringing it up. "

Patient

" If I have got something important that I need to try and talk about but I can't talk about it, I can just text it over to them. If they bring it up, I can just say that I don't want to talk about it but that is what happened. "

Patient

Building relationships with patients digitally can improve face to face appointments.

" If we can engage via text then they're more willing to engage with us in sessions. "

Mental Health Support Worker

If minor issues (such as ordering supplies) are dealt with between clinic appointments, then the health professional and patient can concentrate on the really important issues during the appointment.

Clinical care for people living with long term conditions - the role of digital communication between NHS clinical teams and their patients

Evidence based practice



These points for you to think about when using digital communication with patients come from a research study funded by the National Institute of Health Research.

We observed and interviewed nearly 200 members of specialist clinical teams from across the UK working with young people living with long term conditions.

We interviewed over 150 young people living with a range of conditions including diabetes, cancer, mental illness, liver disease, kidney disease, blood disorders, cystic fibrosis, inflammatory bowel disease and arthritis.

Young people and their clinical teams used text, mobile phone calls and emails to communicate about clinical issues. A few clinical teams engaged on social media sites with their patients.

The clinical teams were using digital communication to improve the engagement of the young people with their services. There is good evidence that improved engagement leads to improved health outcomes.

These young people and their clinical teams have worked out where and when it works well to communicate digitally about clinical matters such as symptoms, drug regimes and emotional distress. From their experience, they know what needs to be discussed and planned before using digital communication about clinical matters.

Their experience can be applied to working with other people with long term conditions who are accustomed to using digital communication (mobile phone, text, email), particularly if they have a smartphone, so access to this communication is straightforward.

If you are planning to communicate digitally with patients, talk about the points we raise with your team and with your organisation's Information, Governance, IT and Patient Safety Leads.

The study name is:

Improving health outcomes for young people with long term conditions: the role of digital communication in current and future patient-clinician communication for NHS providers of specialist clinical services; the LYNC study

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Further details about the study are available at:
www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/projects/hsdr/1220951

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