

January 2, 2020

Many GP practices across Norfolk and Waveney have begun to offer patients online consultations - in addition to all the other ways of contacting your practice.

It means people are getting the help they want quicker and more conveniently. For practices it reduces the pressure on phone lines and helps them keep face to face appointments for those who really need it.

It is being made possible by using a new type of website being introduced, practice by practice. As of December 2019, 18 GP practices in Norfolk and Waveney have replaced their website with the new version, and many more are getting ready to launch. On average three are going live every week.



Dr Ed Turnham, a GP in Norfolk and Waveney who is the local clinical lead for online consultations said: “The new websites and online consultations are proving hugely popular. Almost every comment received from patients or that we have seen on social media has been very positive.”

The website being used in Norfolk and Waveney is a product called Footfall.

It enables people to go online and request advice or an appointment without having to telephone. They can do this 24/7 and the requests are attended to during normal working hours. Patients can still phone if they want.



Patients can ask questions and report symptoms. The practice then looks at the request and responds within a stated timeframe, connecting the patient to the right person, service or support.

For many people, an online response or phone call from a clinician can resolve their enquiry. However they can request a face to face appointment if they wish, or a clinician can advise them to come into the surgery if they think a face to face consultation is necessary.

The new websites offer much more than online consultations. They are designed to help patients navigate their way to find help in exactly the way they would if they walked into reception. The home page of the website is clearly laid out to help you to manage your health more easily and sort out your regular medicines and request to see a health professional.



There are sections containing local health and wellbeing organisations, so you can find the support you need if it is not a problem that a GP can help with. There are sections to help with holiday travel, vaccinations, a 'treatment room' and 'consultation room' to help you with ongoing health problems, a 'prescriptions and medicines centre' to order regular medicines and even a 'reception' room for general enquiries.

Feedback from patients has been overwhelmingly positive. Comments received at an early evaluation include:

The PPG have been excellent and are really driving the website forward and getting people to use it; they use iPads in the waiting area to help patients use FootFall instead of waiting.

Patients saying glowing reviews about FootFall helps other patients want to use it.

Patients view it as another tool to get in touch with the practice, instead of having to phone.

Some practices have reported noticeable reductions in telephone calls and have been able to divert staff off the switchboards and on to other work to support patients. In a survey of 222 people who had an online consultation at Magdalen Medical Practice in Norwich, 50% - more than 100 people - said they would have phoned instead.

Some practises use trained care navigators to undertake an initial sift of Footfall requests so that busy GPs only deal with requests that need their expert eye.

You can see one of the new websites in action at any participating GP practice, or on this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzHd7RLANpM>.



ENDS