

## Top Tips for Using Online Consultations

### 1. Logging in to the system

- **Only patient's registered with the practice can use the system.**  
*If you submit a query and are subsequently identified as not being a registered patient your will be directed to an alternative NHS service;*
- **Carers (including parents) can submit queries on behalf of others using their own login;**
- **If you are having trouble logging in then please call Patient Services on 0116 295 0600 and ask for assistance with using the system.**

### 2. Online Consultations are NOT a barrier to talking to your GP

- **The online consultations system simply allows you to arrange an appointment without having to book this over the phone or in person at the front desk;**
- **The system also allows you tell your doctor much more information, in a secure fashion, prior to the appointment.**  
*This means you will have more time in the appointment to discuss how to take things forwards;*
- **You can either consult via the messaging function on the system or ask the GP to call you instead.**  
*You and your doctor will always still have the option of arranging for you to come down to the surgery to be seen in person if you both feel it is needed.*

### 3. What if I struggle to use the system?

- **We are keen to closely support all of our patients in using this system.**  
*Please do call Patient Services on 0116 295 0600 if you need any assistance. Patient Services will also be happy to provide in-person guidance on how to use the system should you wish to come down to the surgery. NB please always call first to check whether current COVID guidance will allow you to visit in person;*
- **We recognise this system is not for everyone.**  
*Whilst Patient Services have been asked to encourage patients to use it, we fully recognise that some will either not be able to use it, not have access to it, or choose not to access the surgery through this route. Therefore, the practice will continue to offer telephone appointments that can be booked by calling Patient Services. However, we would ask that these are reserved for patients who may, for whatever reason, have difficulty using online consultations.*

#### **4. How do I get the most out of my online consultation?**

- **Try to concentrate on one problem only in the consultation;**
- **Please think about what you want to get out of the appointment. What do you think is wrong?**  
*You may find the questionnaires generated by the system to be too complicated or longwinded. The system is there to help you, not to act as a barrier. Therefore you can choose to skip the questionnaire if that is preferable. However, please do use one of the answer boxes to free text as much detail about your query as possible;*
- **Please keep checking the system for a response and ensure you reply promptly.**  
*We want to be able to continue to offer a same day response service. In order to do this we need patients to respond in a timely fashion once the doctor picks up your query;*
- **If you have expressed a desire to be called back it can help to put in to the consultation notes when you will be available.**  
*If you would like a same day response it would be helpful if you could provide a number of times when you will be available. If you provide only a limited timeslot it is unlikely that will coincide with when the doctor picks up your query.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are Online Consultations?**

Online Consultations is a secure service provided by the practice that gives patients the opportunity to request help for a non-emergency medical problem or other practice matter. You will receive a response by the end of that working day at the very latest; queries submitted outside of working hours will receive a response by the end of the next working day. This means that if you wish to contact the practice out of hours, on a Sunday for instance, with a request which does not require an immediate or emergency response, you can send your request and you will be contacted once the practice is next open and the request has been reviewed.

### **What kind of question can I ask?**

You may ask anything that does not require an immediate emergency response. There are generally two categories of question:

1. An admin or other query, for instance: "have you sent the letter for my referral yet" or "I haven't heard about my appointment with the diabetic nurse yet, can you help?" You should not use the admin or other query option to submit non-emergency medical queries as only non-emergency medical queries are guaranteed to receive a same day response.
2. A request for help with a non-emergency medical problem. If you select this option you will be asked to enter the reason you are requesting help e.g. sore throat, back pain etc. and then you will be asked a series of relevant medical questions. The answers to these questions will provide very useful information to help the GP or practice nurse decide what to do next in order to help you best. You can skip these questions if you are short of time; however, we would ask that you provide as much information as possible about your problem in the 'free text' box. If insufficient information is provided the clinician may ask Patient Services to send the query back to you asking for more information.

### **What happens if I cannot find a suitable subject?**

In the unlikely event that you are unable to find a match for the problem that you enter, you will be prompted to send a simple message about your issue. You will then be contacted to discuss your request as though you had completed a questionnaire. Again, please provide as much detail as possible in your message.

### **Why is this system better than just speaking to the doctor or nurse?**

Giving the GP or practice nurse the opportunity to review and think about your problem and list of symptoms before discussing it with you will enable your doctor or nurse to be better prepared and can lead to a more efficient resolution of your problem. There is also evidence that providing the information and being stimulated to think about the medical issue by the questionnaire is a positive experience for patients.

### **How do I know how long the questionnaire will take?**

It's difficult to predict how long individual questionnaires will take to complete as each question you're asked depends upon the answer you gave to previous questions. Most questionnaires are completed within 5 to 10 minutes, however, if your problem is particularly complex you may find that it takes longer than this; please bear with the process though as the information will be very useful both to you and the GP or practice nurse who will be treating you.

### **Why can't I have a response by email?**

The NHS does not encourage the use of email between medical professionals and patients as personal email addresses outside of the NHS are not necessarily secure, this means that your information may not remain private. We take your privacy very seriously. The online consultation system we use provides a messaging system so that you can have a secure and private electronic discussion with your general practice instead. You need to use the system as a registered user to make this option available to you and the practice.

### **What happens to the information gathered?**

Any information gathered is sent directly to your practice. This will then be handled within the practice in the same way as any other information patients provide and will be subject to the usual privacy and security rules. The information you enter, in a totally anonymised fashion, may be used for service improvement however it will not be released to any third parties or be kept in an identifiable format.

**I have heard that doctors are encouraging people to "self-care" and I wonder if online consultation can help with this?**

We would always encourage people to search out information to help themselves with medical problems where appropriate. We'll provide links to established and reliable sources of medical information which you may decide to use either to help with an existing medical problem or to deal with a new medical problem. Online consultation provides an efficient method of asking for non-emergency medical help from your General Practice so, if you decide to self-manage a problem you can do so, safe in the knowledge that should you wish to ask for help or advice you will be able to get a response.

**Does the system use artificial intelligence to decide on a course of action?**

No. The consultation you send is always reviewed and assessed by an appropriately qualified member of our team. If you send an administrative consultation this will be one of our administrative team who may then discuss this with a clinician (e.g. if you ask when your repeat prescription will be ready they may need to check with a doctor). If you send a medical consultation this will always be assessed by an appropriately qualified clinician.

**Am I able to ask for a response from a particular GP or nurse?**

Generally, yes. Obviously, it is impossible to always guarantee a response from a named individual as they may not be available. In the event that the person who you have asked for is unable to respond then you will hear from the practice anyway.

**How do you know the identity of the person sending a message?**

Practice staff will identify patients and their carers when they review the information sent to the practice, which includes patient (and carer) identifiable data - name, date of birth and phone number, comparing this against that held in the patient record, along with other useful information such as the problem identified or additional comments made in the submission. If they feel they need to contact the patient or carer by phone to verify the patient's identity, they will do so. This is no different to current practice and is taken very seriously, if at any time the practice staff are unsure of the identity of the person being spoken to, they will be asked to attend the practice in person.