



Engaging with the right person at the right time to enable effective condition management

Using a smart phone or tablet makes it easy to email or text at any time

Patients value the ease of using digital communication and want a timely response. They see digital communication as reducing the burden for health professionals.

"I wouldn't feel that I had such a direct access if I had to phone them really. I know that I can just email and ask a question, and I'll get an answer back. I wouldn't feel like I'm taking up too much of her time."

Patient

Health professionals need to respond to digital communication from patients in a timely manner - not always easy in the face of numerous clinical demands.

"I do try and do it but if I'm not around, if I'm busy, then I often forget or just don't do it and they email again and I have to do it."

Consultant

Health professionals have developed strategies such as:

- ▶ make a quick decision on when and how to respond to text or email
- ▶ use telephone when immediate communication needed
- ▶ use mobile technology so communication is more easily integrated with other work

"It means I can do it anywhere, so quite often I might be in the middle of doing something and I'll think, oh I just need to text this young person about their benefits."

Social Worker

Asynchronous communication (email/text) has advantages over telephone calls

Health professionals value being able to construct a measured message for their patient in an uninterrupted moment. Email and text are NOT used for conveying bad news, which is always given face to face.

"Email gives you thinking space so that you can formulate a really strong response."

Specialist Physiotherapist

Patients value the non-intrusive nature of text and email. They can look at the message and reply at a time convenient to them. Phone calls, particularly for those who are at work or college, require the patient to find a space where there is privacy.

"I don't have time to find my own private space. What I am talking about to the nurse is private, I don't want people around me to hear. Being able to send him a quick text is so helpful."

Patient

Text and email can reach the right person at the right time

Patients value being able to text or email a question as it occurs to them rather than tracking down a member of the clinical team on the telephone or waiting until they have an appointment.

"It's really good for us to be able to have contact and catch up at intervals throughout the six months (between appointments) rather than having to make long journeys."

Patient

Email is good for sending information to patients quickly. Embedded links can be used to signpost patients to resources.

Providing a range of methods of communication is the best way to engage patients

"They'll say, 'oh it's easier to text me', or 'I never check my emails, don't email me'. I go by whatever they say."

Social Worker

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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