



## Going digital with patients will increase my workload – concerns, real world experiences and solutions

### More work for an already stretched service

The volume of communication goes up, which means more work BUT clinical teams see the benefits:

- ▶ better communication with often hard to reach patients
- ▶ more efficient working
- ▶ reduction in duplication of work

“ It has massively improved the contact that we have with some of our patients. ”

Physiotherapist

The number of emails and texts was not overwhelming or inappropriate BUT clinical teams need to:

- ▶ establish a system for dealing with any misuse that does occur
- ▶ work out as a team how to deal with emails and texts
- ▶ strike a balance between enhancing care and workload

“ Having direct access to the consultant is great for the patient but it's not so great for the consultant. ”

Consultant

### Patient expectations will be high so need managing

- ▶ set reasonable expectations from the start
- ▶ be clear about times when the service is available and expected response times
- ▶ put bounce back and answer messages in place for communication received out of hours and when staff are away

“ There's a schedule for the month that goes out to the young people who are receiving that treatment to say who the named contact is for that day, during what hours they are contactable and their mobile number. ”

Team Leader

### Patients may overburden the service with unnecessary communication

Clinical teams have found this rarely happens. The one or two cases cited were dealt with at clinic level:

- ▶ be aware of potential misuse by patients and have a strategy for dealing with individuals
- ▶ keep service users aware of the scope and purpose of available digital communications

### Plan how to keep clinical records updated

“ We started printing off every email and it would go in the back of the patient notes. That just hasn't been feasible to continue. ”

Physiotherapist

### Using your own mobile to make timely contact with patients during your busy day

Although done with the best of intentions, this can be problematic for ensuring patient/clinician boundaries are retained, and for patient safety and confidentiality.

“ There have been a couple of incidents when I've done a home visit and I have forgotten to take our shared Trust mobile with me. I've used my own mobile to send a message to the person. That person then has my number... and that has been a bit of an issue. ”

Medical Lead Nurse

# 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](http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/projects/hsdr/1220951)

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Funding Acknowledgement: This project was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) Programme (Project Number 12/209/51)  
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