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Examining GP online consultation in a primary care setting in east midlands, UK



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Abstract

Background: Increasing pressure threatens to overwhelm primary care services, affecting the quality of care and their role as gatekeepers to specialised care services. This study investigated healthcare users' acceptability of – and the effectiveness of – an e-consultation system in primary care services.

Methods: Seven GP practices in East-Midlands, all of whom use online consultation system participated in the study, with a retrospective review being undertaken of 189 electronic patients' records (age range of 18–76 years) over 5 months. The focus was on the electronic records of patients who accessed the service for five different conditions identified as presenting common conditions seen by the GPs practices. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS to perform an exploratory data analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results: The results showed a positive reception of the online consultation platform, with an average satisfaction score of 4.15 (most likely to recommend score = 5). Given the nature of the conditions, 47.6% of patients had experienced a previous episode of the health condition they were seeking consultation for, and a total of 72% had existing comorbidities. Follow-up activity occurred for 87.3% of patients, 66.1% of which included at least one follow-up visit for the same condition as the initial online consultation.

Conclusion: The results suggest that online consultation is convenient for patients, and it also has the potential to relieve pressure placed on primary care services. Although a number of challenges were identified, such as patient verification, this study gives insight into – and enhances our understanding of – the use of online GP consultations