

GPs divided over best way to integrate digital services in UK practices

New research reveals differing views from GPs over how NHS should use new technology

- *39% think all practices should use the same NHS digital triaging service, while 34% believe individual practices should be able to pick the service they use*
- *60% say the impact of digital services has been exaggerated – rising to 70% among the UK's longest serving GPs (practicing over 30 years)*
- *GPs believe the single most important thing digital services need to do is reduce face-to-face appointments (33% chose this option, the most popular choice)*
- *But 61% expect the NHS's digital triage app to INCREASE the number of patients wanting to see a GP in person*

London, 4 October 2018 – A new survey of 1,003 GPs today reveals that opinion in the UK's GP community is largely divided over the best way to adopt technology in their practices. 39% said that every practice should use the same NHS digital triaging service. But a similar number of GPs (34%) held contrasting views, believing that each practice should be able to choose which service works best for them. A further 3% believe that all practices should use the same non-NHS digital triaging service.

Against the backdrop of Health Secretary Matt Hancock making the digitalisation of the NHS one of his top priorities, the majority of GPs remain cautious about the broad impact of digital services. 60% say their impact has been exaggerated; a figure that rises to 70% among the country's longest-serving GPs. In addition, GPs are not convinced by the capability of the NHS App, due to launch in December, to help reduce demand on primary care services. 61% expect that the NHS app, which entered beta testing last week, is likely to actually increase the number of patients wanting to see a GP in person.

In fact, there is significant doubt in the GP community over the NHS's ability to effectively implement new digital services, with the vast majority (83%) not confident in its capability to do so. Only 14% were confident that the NHS App will launch by the end of the year.

"It's clear that the views of GPs haven't always been properly considered when it comes to the integration of digital services into the NHS," said Andrew Gardner, CEO of Doctorlink. "We acknowledge this and make sure that we develop our services in partnership with, and in service of, the GP community. As an industry, we must do more to address GPs valid questions and prove that digital services can help them deliver better outcomes for patients."

The survey found that doctors are also split over the fundamental question of whether digital services are important in improving the quality of primary care, with 52% saying it is important and 40% thinking that it isn't. When asked what is the most significant problem that technology must solve – GPs most often named face to face appointments as their top priority (33%). This is felt even more acutely in the country's biggest practices (37% among GPs with over 10,000 patients listed in their practice).

"Most GPs believe that these services will improve the quality of primary care offered by the NHS, but many of us have important questions when it comes to their implementation," said Dr Bruce Websdale, a South West London GP. "These findings reinforce the importance of close collaboration between the people developing these services and the people using them on the frontline of the NHS."

GPs are strongly united when it comes to the role of clinicians in the design of digital services. 94% say clinician involvement is important to the development of digital services to support the delivery of primary care. There is also very strong awareness of digital GP and triaging services among the majority of GPs. 81% are aware of the major companies and products that are currently available for delivering digital GP services to the NHS (of those included in the survey).

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Notes to Editors

About the survey

ComRes interviewed 1,003 GPs in the UK online from 15th to 29th August 2018. Data were nationally representative by practising region. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables can be accessed at www.comresglobal.com/our-work/poll-archive.

About Doctorlink

Established by a team of healthcare and technology experts, Doctorlink was founded in 2016 to help improve the accessibility, quality and cost-effectiveness of healthcare services.

Doctorlink provides a digital gateway that connect patients with NHS primary healthcare services. Through our clinically approved digital triage, advice tool and service finder solution, GPs can reduce growing levels of demand while improving the primary care experience for patients.

The robust clinical algorithms contained within the Doctorlink platform are fully insured. Registered patients have access to a digital symptom checker, receive disposition and medical advice based specifically upon their responses, and can book appointments as required directly through an online system.

Doctorlink is working with STPs, CCGs, GPs and 111 services across England, to support patient demand, address operational challenges and improve patient experience. As of October 2018, Doctorlink actively works with approximately 30 CCGs, STPs, GP Groups and individual surgeries. Doctorlink is contracted across 400 GP practices, representing a catchment of 3.2 million patients in England.

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