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Hannah Crouch

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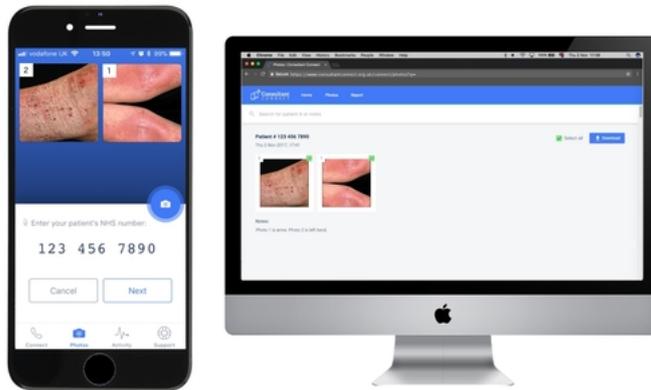
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A platform which gives GPs the ability to immediately speak to a local specialist is hoping to help ease winter pressures on A&E departments.

Most hospitals operate at capacity during winter with their A&E departments under great pressure.

Since Consultant Connect's launch in 2015, more than two in three patients across the UK have avoided a trip to A&E and with the colder months approaching, it hopes to further spare patients a visit to the hospital.

Consultant Connect provides a phone line where GPs can get expert advice in real time, instead of writing to the consultant and waiting days for a response or sending the patient to hospital.

It covers a number of specialities including acute medicine, cardiology, paediatrics, neurology and rheumatology.

Dr Michael Banna, a GP in Bognor Regis, said the service gives him and his patients 'peace of mind' as it means there isn't an 'anxious' three-month wait for a referral to a specialist.

While Dr Boo McConnell, GP at St James' Surgery in Bath, said the service is 'hugely beneficial' to him as he has the tools to provide the best care for his patients.

"When my patient leaves my surgery, they can feel confident that we've given them the best advice," McConnell said.

The service allows GPs to provide the right care for their patients and directs them to the right place to receive care which reduces the number of people turning up to A&E unnecessarily.

Jonathan Patrick, chief executive of Consultant Connect said it was 'fantastic' to see the positive impact the service had on patients and GPs.

"We're delighted to help GPs provide the best possible care for their patients while enabling them to build better relationships with local specialists," Patrick said.

An online consultation GP at Hand was launched this month in a bid to slash waiting times.

The free NHS, GP at Hand service allows patients to book appointments and talk to their doctor through their smartphones.

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