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Service linking GPs with consultants prevents thousands of hospital visits

By Neil Roberts on the 14 September 2017

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More than 18,500 patients have been spared an outpatient hospital visit by a service that helps GPs seek advice directly from hospital consultants, according to the provider behind the scheme.



Telephone advice: GPs contact consultants (Photo: JH Lancy)

The Consultant Connect service is estimated to have saved the NHS £7.1m in avoided hospital visits since it was set up in July 2015.

The service allows GPs to speak directly with a consultant, often with the patient still in the room, to get specialist advice in real time. The service covers a number of specialities including acute medicine, breast surgery, cardiology, paediatrics, neurology and rheumatology.

Bath GP and clinical chair of Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) CCG Dr Ian Orpen said the service was initially funded by the commissioning group for his area and subsequently by

the national CQUIN initiative.

Expert advice

GPs using the service are able to use a phone number or app to select the relevant speciality and connect directly to a hospital consultant.

GPs in Bath are connected with doctors at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust.

The Consultant Connect service is now in use at 1,600 practices across the UK, and has facilitated more than 51,000 calls to local hospital doctors.

In North East Essex, 2,200 patients avoided a trip to hospital since July 2015, saving the NHS an estimated £825,000. In Leicester 1,900 patients avoided a hospital attendance saving the NHS an estimated £814,000 since January 2016. And in Bath, 1,500 patients avoided a hospital attendance saving the NHS an estimated £591,000 since December 2015.

Hospital visits

Dr Orpen told *GPonline*: 'It means consultants are much easier to get hold of. Previously, you may have been lucky enough to call the hospital at the right time to speak to a consultant, but more often than not you would have waited a long time on the phone and possibly not have been able to speak to anyone. With Consultant Connect, you can speak to a consultant while the patient is literally with you in the room, saving you both time and avoiding unnecessary referrals and/or visits to hospital.'

'In fact, data from my own surgery show that in the year since starting to use Consultant Connect, almost half of calls have resulted in avoiding an unnecessary referral.'

Consultant Connect CEO Jonathan Patrick said: 'We're delighted to help GPs provide the best possible care for their patients while enabling them to build better relationships with local specialists.'