

Telephone Advice & Guidance in South East London: Consultant Connect

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A partnership of NHS providers and Clinical Commissioning Groups serving the boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, with NHS England



Background

- Increasing demand for elective care services across South East London (SEL).
 - In 2018/19 there was a 3% increase in SEL GP referrals to acute services compared with 2017/18
 - Some providers are experiencing significant growth in referrals – GSTT saw a 14% increase in referrals from SEL GP practices in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18.
- Recognition that more referrals could be managed within primary care with advice and guidance from a specialist.
 - Although it varies by specialty, audits indicate that roughly 25% of referrals do not require secondary care level treatment and could be managed in primary care with advice, guidance and support.
- Limited use of existing advice and guidance services e.g. e-RS
 - Time consuming and not always easy to use
 - Difficult to engage in a dialogue, which is challenging when discussing complex cases
 - Outcomes from written advice and guidance are not always positive enough to justify the effort required.

What is Consultant Connect?

- Consultant Connect is a telephone advice and guidance service which allows GPs to speak with local hospital specialty consultants (GSTT, KCH and LGT).
- GPs are able to access the service either through their GP practice's unique telephone number or via the Consultant Connect app.
- The GP dials the number and selects the specialty OR goes into the Consultant Connect app, select the speciality which then automatically dials through.
- The call is put through to a "rota" of specialty consultants who are available to answer calls during that clinical session. Each consultant is given approximately 20 seconds to answer a call; if they are not in a position to take a call then it automatically loops to the next consultant and so on until the call is answered.
- If the call does not connect then the caller is advised to call back later or to revert to pre-existing means of securing advice e.g. e-RS.
- Before the call ends, the GP is asked to record the outcome of the call - they can select from a number options e.g. referral avoided, referral necessary.
- All conversations are digitally recorded for future reference and for medico-legal purposes.
- The Consultant Connect app also allows GPs to take photos in an IG compliant way. The photos can be sent directly to specialty teams (if this functionality has been set-up) or attached to patient records, referrals and advice and guidance requests.

Specialties currently available in SEL:

	Bexley	Bromley	Greenwich	Lambeth	Lewisham	Southwark
Ambulatory Care	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Acute Medical Ambulatory		Yes				
Acute Surgical Ambulatory		Yes				
Cardiology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dermatology				PhotoSAF Sharing		PhotoSAF Sharing
Diabetes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Elderly Care	Yes		Yes			
ENT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Endocrinology		Yes		Yes		Yes
Frailty					Yes	
Gastroenterology		Yes		Yes		Yes
Gynaecology	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Haematology		Yes		Yes		Yes
Joint Emergency Team			Yes			
Medicine Management	Yes					
Mental Health - Older Adults		Yes	Yes			
Mental Health - Working Age Adults		Yes	Yes			
Neurology		Yes		Yes		Yes
Paediatrics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rheumatology		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Vascular Surgery		Yes		Yes		Yes

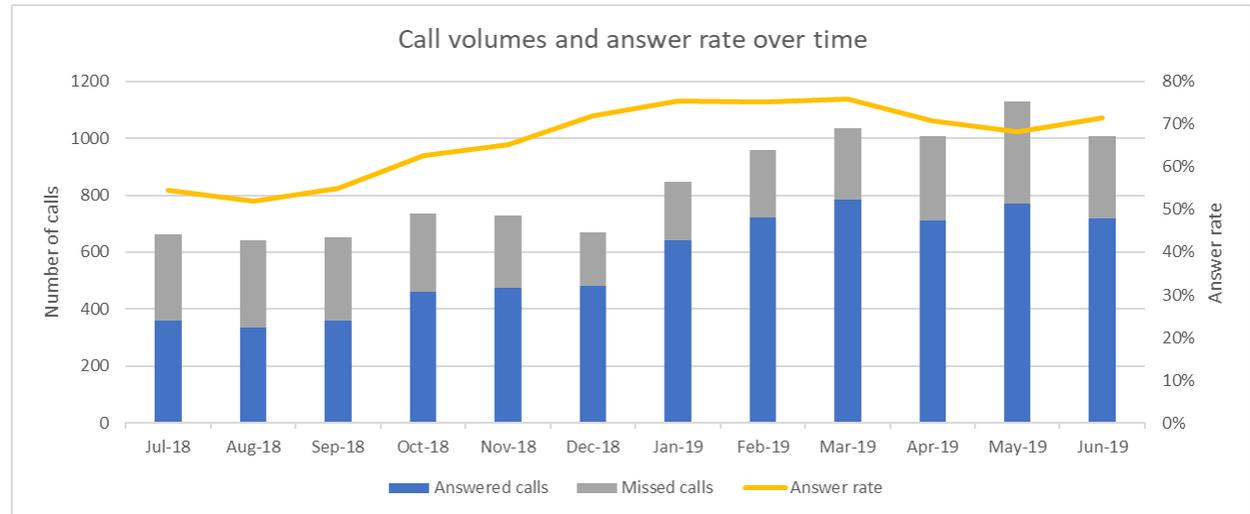
Key

- Provided by GSTT
- Provided by KCH
- Provided by GSTT and KCH
- Provided by LGT
- Provided by Oxleas
- Provided by Bexley CCG
- Backed up by National Consultant Network

Consultant Connect statistics

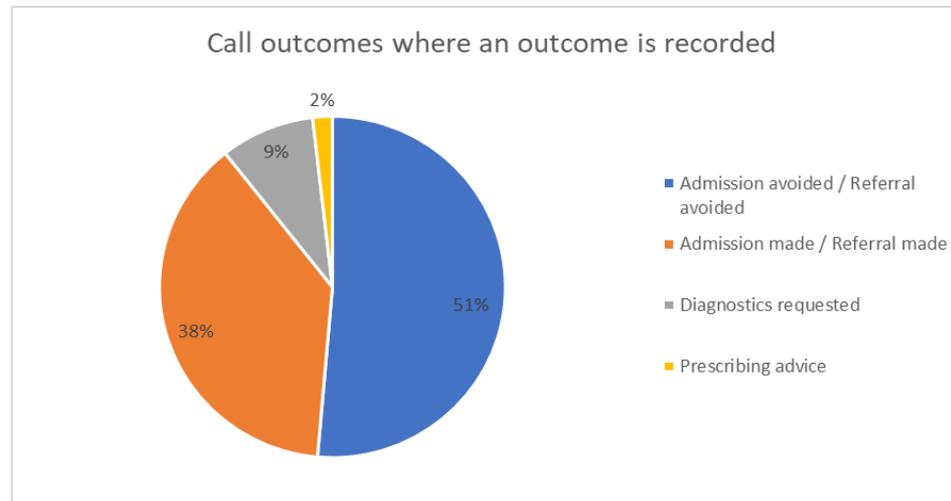
Over last 12 months (July 2018 – June 2019):

- 10,071 calls placed
- 6,815 calls answered
- 68% answer rate
- Average wait time 1.2 minutes
- Average talk time 3.6 minutes



Outcomes:

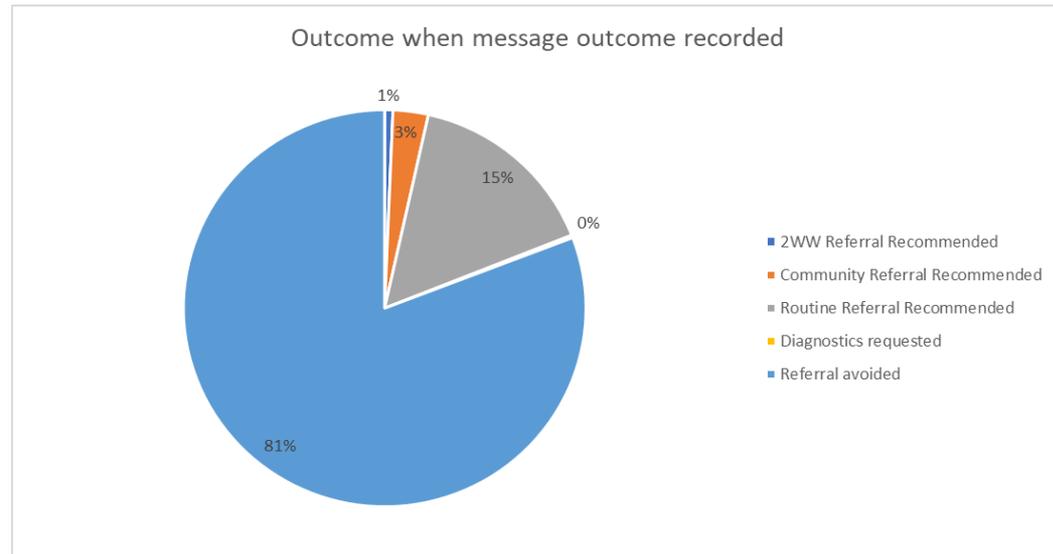
- 3,427 calls with an outcome recorded (50%)
- 1,742 calls with outcome of “Admission avoided” or “Referral avoided” (51%)



PhotoSAF statistics

Dermatology PhotoSAF sharing
(September 2018 – June 2019):

- 525 requests made
- Average response time of 1.9 days
- 68% responded to in less than 1 day
- 458 with an outcome recorded
- 370 with outcome of “Referral avoided” (81%)



Feedback

GP feedback:

- 69% would recommend Consultant Connect
- 79% said they always or often received helpful advice
- 81% said Consultant Connect had enhanced their knowledge
- 86% said there was a need for a telephone A&G

“Useful for quick answers and support in decision making.”

“It’s a great service generally”

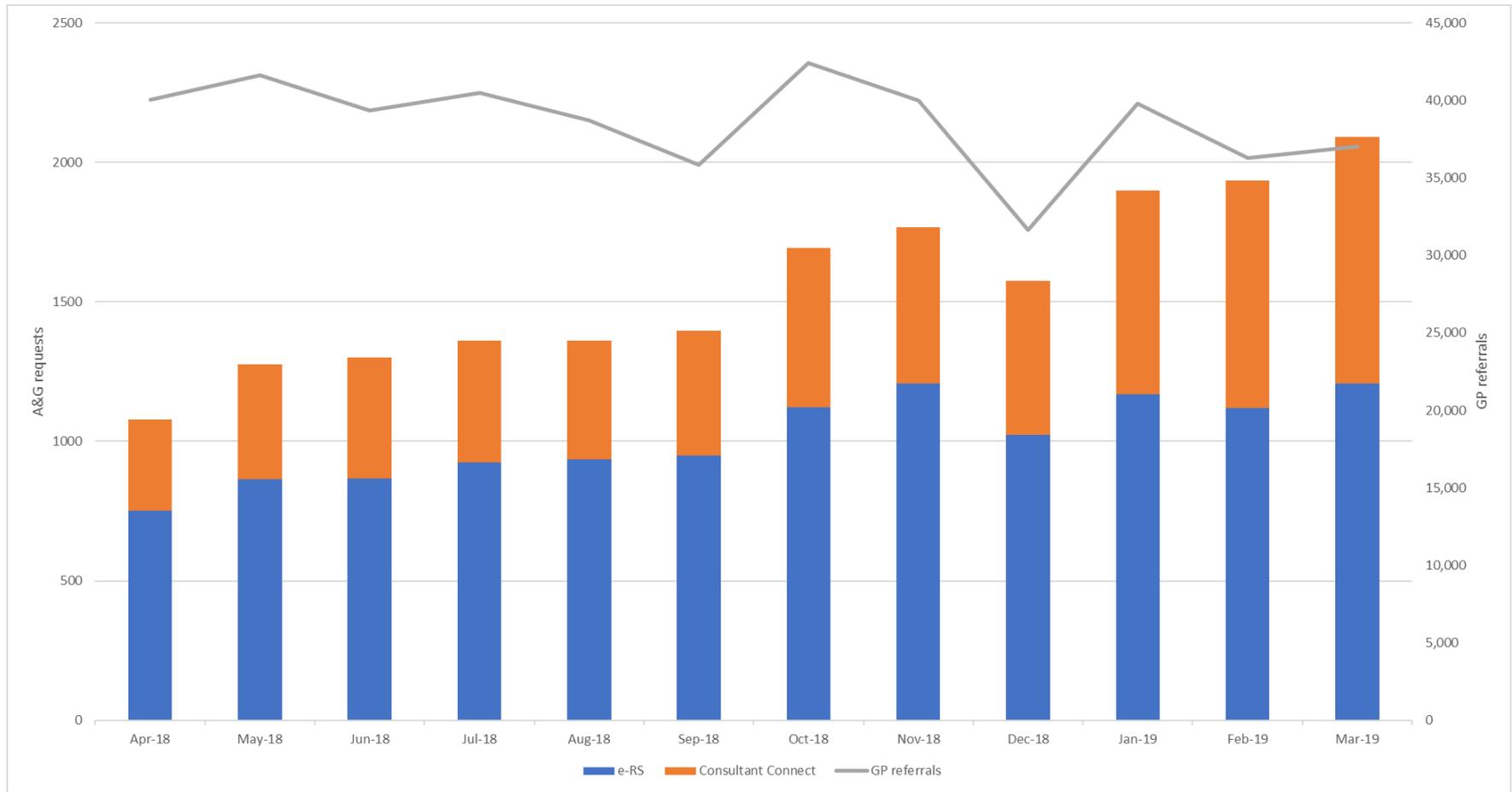
“I was very impressed at being able to speak to an expert. I felt my questions were answered in a non rushed manner and very informative and helpful.”

“Much more convenient than the old system of calling and bleeping via switchboard, much quicker overall”

Consultant feedback:

- 77% found Consultant Connect easy to use
- 57% said GPs always or usually used Consultant Connect appropriately

Wider impact?



Moving forwards

There are a number of areas we are exploring further:

- **Wider roll out of Consultant Connect to more specialties.** There are a number of areas where we are looking to roll out Consultant Connect including:
 - Physical health e.g. urology
 - Mental health
 - Medicine management
 - Urgent and emergency care
- **Wider use of the National Consultant Network:** Consultant Connect have a National Consultant Network which involves NHS consultants working in other parts of the country backing up local specialty lines. We have this back-up in place in some specialties, which has boosted answer rates, and has been well received by GPs. We're looking to back-up more lines with the National Consultants Network.
- **Giving specialists access to other specialists:** Consultant Connect has a Consultant to Consultant function which allows specialists in one area to contact other specialists set-up on Consultant Connect. An example of where we're looking to use this feature, is in giving Mental Health specialists access to Physical Health specialists.
- **Rolling out wider usage of PhotoSAF:** PhotoSAF allows GPs to take photos in an IG compliant way, and for them to be attached to patient records, referrals and advice and guidance requests. We will be encouraging all GPs in SEL to attach photos with dermatology referrals.