



CCGS USE ADVANCED GP TELEPHONY TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND PATIENT EXPERIENCE

By Tracey Armitage - 31st July 2018  39  0

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Three CCGs have chosen the latest in telephone technology to deliver on the region's STP vision for integrated care and help GP surgeries improve patient access and experience

South Worcestershire, Redditch and Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest CCGs are rolling out advanced cloud-based VOIP telephone services across the region's GP surgeries to achieve NHS plans for more efficient and effective care.

The move will provide patients with easier access to healthcare, staff with the ability to work more efficiently and remotely, and doctors with a cost-effective platform to reduce DNAs and deliver new forms of consultation.

The three CCGs will be implementing a system called Surgery Connect to replace many of the outdated and expensive phone systems that its member practices have in place.

This new technology will improve patient access and experience by making it easier for patients to get through to a GP, and allow them to manage their own appointments. This will help reduce appointment non-attendance, or DNAs, which are said to cost the NHS around £1bn every year.

Practices will also be able to provide extended hours access, match capacity to demand, and deliver new forms of consultation – all priorities for NHS England's GP Forward View.

The innovation helps achieve the region's digital plans, as described in its Local Digital Roadmap (LDR), as well as the vision for more efficient, effective integrated health and care outlined in its Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) plans.

"Joined up telephony was one of the priorities for our LDR," said James Harley, primary care IT lead for the CCGs. The roadmap recognised that, in order to achieve the region's vision of more effective care, improvements to telephony were crucial – almost nine out of ten patients use the telephone system as their first point of contact with the health service, according to the latest [GP Patient Survey](#).

"We saw that lots of GP practices were paying too much for their phone systems, which were often antiquated and did not have the functionality required to support new ways of working. With Surgery Connect, we saw that the system had been designed with GP input, and built to meet the needs of practices."

Patients can manage their own appointments over the phone, and – as the system is cloud hosted – has the potential to enable patients to contact any one of several surgeries in evenings and weekends to arrange appointments and speak to a GP – a key enabler for an Extended Access service.

The system supports remote and mobile working, so that GPs and other healthcare staff can be in contact with patients via a mobile app. GPs can carry out consultations over the phone and, ultimately, will be able to do the same through video.

Performance dashboards identify call volumes, helping practices and commissioners manage demand on the region's healthcare services.

Calls can be answered in order, reducing patient frustration and complaints. Less time will be wasted on patient calls, as practice staff see a patient's record when they come through on the phone. And calls can be recorded and associated with the patient record, to help GPs better understand a patient's needs.

Business continuity is also improved. "If someone drills through the Internet connection at a practice, we can quickly switch the phone system over to mobile devices so there is no loss of service for patients or staff," said James Harley.

The CCGs will reduce infrastructure costs by removing the need for multiple contracts with providers, and cut the cost of calls by using VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol).

The CCGs have used Estates and Technology Transformation Funding (ETTF) to support the rollout of the services, which is being led by the Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit. It is looking to start initial implementation in the summer with 16 practices, expanding to a total of 64 practices and 13 branch sites as old phone contracts run their course.

Once the infrastructure is in place, the CCGs will look to extend use of the phone system to other care settings, such as community providers. As the technology is cloud-based, scale is not an issue. "It gives us a great opportunity for more joined up working," said James Harley.

With more efficient and effective communication infrastructure, these CCGs are showing that telephony can be a key vehicle for national and regional plans for sustainable, digitally-enabled healthcare transformation.

About X-on

X-on is a pioneer of cloud telephony in the UK. With over 18 years of experience, we have worked with thousands of customers across many industries to deliver simple communications choices to benefit their business. We work with healthcare professionals to provide cost-effective communications systems such as Surgery Connect, Contact Centre and Call Recording that are tailored to their needs and allow them to spend their valuable time and money on what matters most – patients. Find out more about our services for healthcare: <http://www.x-on.co.uk/healthcare>

Surgery Connect is available to individual practices, federations and clinical commissioning groups via contact with X-on Technology. Find out more about Surgery Connect at: <http://www.surgeryconnect.co.uk>

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