

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust cuts letter costs in half with digital launch



Postal
appointment
letter costs
reduce by **51%**

Instant delivery of digital letters

A new patient communications project by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust has cut the cost of appointment letters by 51%, as part of a trust-wide initiative to drive digital efficiency.

Following the launch in July 2018, 54% of eligible patients are choosing to receive their appointment details digitally, which halves the cost the Trust traditionally spends per letter on posted correspondence. Delivery is instant and trackable too, mitigating patients from missing appointments due to postal letters arriving too late or lost mail.

The digital letter portal has been pioneered by Healthcare Communications and its introduction follows the success of a multi-channel appointment reminder service that has helped the Trust reduce DNAs from 8.9% to 7.5%, freeing up 38,000 reusable appointments.



54% of patients
are choosing
digital letters
over post

Key benefits

Sue Elliston, Directorate Manager of Centralised Outpatients and Administration Services for the Trust, said: "During the last year, we have totally overhauled our appointment booking operations. The appointment reminder campaign has helped us significantly reduce the number of patients failing to attend their appointments and we have now upscaled our digital offering this summer to give patients the ability to access appointment letters and supporting information via their mobile device or computer."

"The patient portal is proving successful in a number of ways. It improves patient experience as it allows them to interact and have information about their appointment at their fingertips. It's also allowing our communications to be responsive to the needs of our patients – for example – allowing instant translation into the patient's preferred language, or converting the text to speech. There are benefits to the Trust as well by delivering a direct cost saving when compared to the postage charge and reducing admin time involved in traditional letters, thus making our processes much more efficient."



Multi-channel
reminders free up
38,000 reusable
appointments



Converts digital
letter text into
99 different
languages



Driving digital across the Trust

Kenny Bloxham, commercial director of Healthcare Communications, which has been working with the NHS for 18 years, said: "The team at ELHT's patient communications transformation programme is moving at pace, and we have now brought digital options to the entire patient journey – from the appointment letter and reminders, to the Friends and Family Test feedback."

The patient portal sends a secure digital invite for the patient to view appointment letters, pre-assessments and supporting information on their smartphone, tablet or desktop. Patients can click to immediately confirm, cancel or rebook their appointment, as well as adding the appointment in their digital calendar, and accessing real-time travel maps. They can also save the letter or print it, and access text-to-speech functionality and 99 language translation options.

Next steps

In the first phase, digital letters have been introduced to East Lancashire's centralised outpatient appointment bookings and will be rolled out to specialist outpatient areas, including pre-op, pathology and therapies.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust is now working with Healthcare Communications for all of its patient communications initiatives – including SMS, IVM (Interactive Voice Message) and call centre agent reminder services, the digital letter portal, and electronic Friends and Family test.

Digital letter features

- Gives the appointment time, date and location
- Patients can instantly confirm, rebook or cancel with one click
- Attach additional information, such as leaflets, directions and pre-clinic instructions
- Adds the appointment directly into patients' digital calendars as a further reminder prompt
- Enable patients to add speech, reading and translation options in 99 languages to digital text. The software supports patient accessibility and reduces translation and printing costs for leaflets
- Include a barcode/QR code to enable patients to self-check in for a smoother arrival process for staff and patients
- If the patient doesn't open the digital letter within 24 hours, a postal letter is automatically sent
- Provides interactive home to hospital Google map with live travel info to prevent on the day patient delays
- Add links to online newsletters, videos and patient surveys within the letter

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Sue Elliston

Directorate Manager of Centralised Outpatients and Administration Services

