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## Patients' preference to digital letters delivers £152,000 in annual cost savings

90% of patients surveyed would recommend receiving appointment letters digitally

Case study



**Northern Lincolnshire  
and Goole**

NHS Foundation Trust



Although NHS appointment letters are necessary, the manual burden of creating, printing and posting physical letters is a huge problem for staff, particularly at a time of long waiting lists and staff shortages.

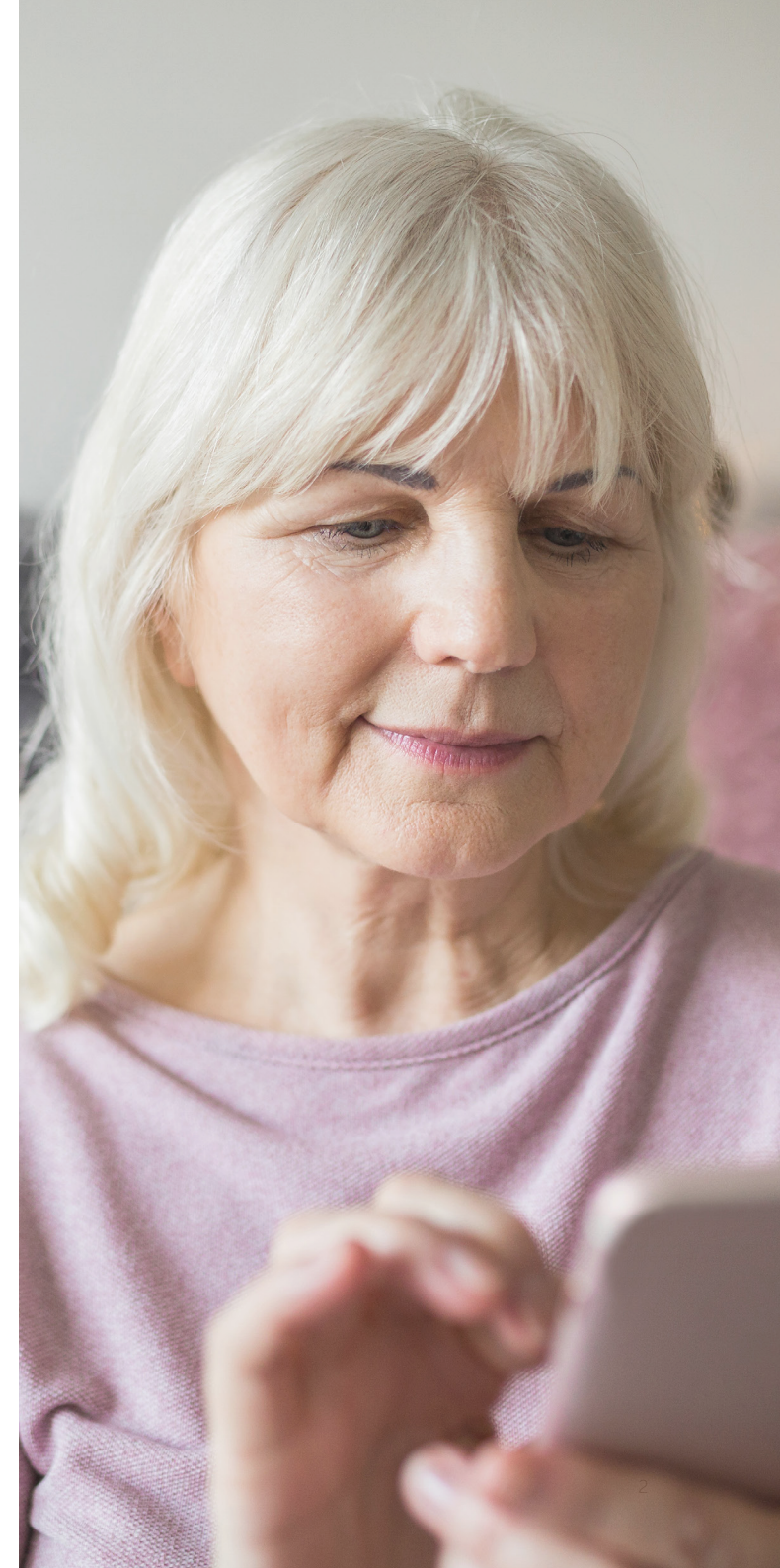
These issues also create lengthy call queues, and without an easy way for patients to cancel or reschedule their appointments, the number of DNAs (Did Not Attend) and wasted slots can have a major impact on hospital efficiencies and clinic capacity.

## Challenge

- Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust (NLaG) wanted to find a new solution for patient appointment letters which would help tackle the admin burden on staff.
- They also needed to reduce their DNA rate, as well as the physical cost of printing and posting their outpatient letters.
- As part of the Outpatient Improvement Programme, the Trust were trying to lower their paper consumption and reliance on paper records.

**“I really do believe technology can impact the patient experience. Being able to use digital means we can fill all our appointments, and we can reduce the waiting list.”**

Catherine Sowerby, Outpatient Transformation Programme Manager



# Solution

Healthcare Communications (HC) Patient Engagement Portal which empowers patients to view appointment letters, clinic specific instructions and essential reading digitally.

- Patients can instantly confirm, reschedule and cancel appointments using their smartphone, tablet or computer.
- Two SMS reminders are sent to patients ahead of their appointment, one with interactive options.
- Reschedule or cancel responses are returned to the Trust in real-time.
- Those who don't access their digital letter within 48 hours automatically receive letters by post.
- Digital text can be converted to over 100 languages, read aloud in 42 languages, or highlighted and enlarged for visually impaired patients.
- Confirmed appointments can be added directly to patients' digital calendars, and a live travel map guides patients to the correct area.
- Staff can easily apply tailored messages to letters in house, such as paragraphs advising parking rules, using templates and profiles.
- The platform can also host URL links enabling the Trust to send procedural specific information to patients such as pre-op prep.
- The portal can also be used to complete pre-assessment questionnaires remotely and PIFU (Patient Initiated Follow Ups).

**“The most important benefit for us is that it allows us to be much more patient-centric. In addition, patients come in and sometimes have to do a pre-assessment questionnaire for surgery; they can do that at home now and send it in, rather than spend 30 to 40 minutes sitting in the hospital carrying out that procedure.”**

Catherine Sowerby, Outpatient Transformation Programme Manager

Welcome to your digital letter for your local NHS hospital

Below is your letter for your upcoming appointment

18 Monday | Dec 2024  
08.30

ADAM CITIZEN

Healthcare Hospital

Outpatients

Dr Jane Smith

00000 000000

I WILL BE ATTENDING THIS APPOINTMENT

I CAN'T ATTEND THIS APPOINTMENT, BOOK ME ANOTHER

I NO LONGER NEED THIS APPOINTMENT

# Benefits

Through HC's portal, NLaG have sent over 500,000 appointment letters digitally since the service went live and quickly realised the following benefits:

- **65%** of eligible patients are now using the solution, with postage and **cost savings equalling to £152,000 in the first year.**
- A reduction in missed appointments and now cancelled slots can easily be given to waiting list patients, helping to tackle backlog.
- The Trust carried out a patient survey on accessing digital appointment letters and received fantastic feedback with almost **a 20% response rate.**
- NLaG can provide patients with live information, such as a change in appointment time, reducing time wasted for the patient and enhancing their experience.
- The auditing platform ensures that staff can be confident patients are receiving and reading letters.
- They are now communicating with patients in their first language, which in a diverse community will improve experience and reduce DNAs through miscommunication.
- The portal has improved the way the Trust manages staffing levels needed for appointments, meaning staff time can be utilised for other tasks.
- NLaG also introduced 2-way SMS appointment reminders which enables patients to cancel or rebook their appointment if necessary, which saw an immediate reduction in DNA rates from 10% down to just 7%.



**65% of eligible patients are now using the solution**



**Cost savings equalling to £152,000 in the first year**

**“One patient shared his delight that his letters could be read aloud via the patient portal, granting him privacy for the first time as it meant he no longer had to rely on a family member to read the paper letters.**

**Another told us how he was able to reschedule a long-awaited consultant appointment that was scheduled during a holiday.**

**The notification arrived digitally while he was abroad and so he could easily reschedule, meaning he didn't miss the appointment and his care wasn't unduly delayed.”**

Jackie France,  
Associate Director for Patient Services

# Patient survey results



**99%**

of patients were able to find their appointment details when accessing the portal



**5,200**

patients who use digital letters responded to the survey



**97%**

of patient said their digital letter was understandable and clear



**95%**

of patient found all the information they required on the portal to attend their appointment



**90%**

of patients said they would recommend the Patient Portal and digital appointment letter to friends and family



**60s to 70s**

the age group with the most responses to portal patient survey – challenging stereotypes



**6%**

Reworked dashboard – uptake gone up by 6%



**Actions**

training for volunteers to be advocates for digital letters and help patients find their way



**10%**

less than 10% of patients said they needed any support when visiting the portal

# Patient comments



“Easy to follow instructions”



“Precise and clear communication”



“It helped me to keep track of my appointments”



“Simple to use, better for the environment and cheaper for the NHS”



“Appointments straight to my calendar. It also saves money on sending it by post and paper”



“I am away from home at the moment and would not have known about this appointment until I returned home. I am now fully prepared for your call”



“It is excellent because it is on my phone and I have it with me all the time. There is no waste of paper and I can also put it on my calendar with a reminder”



“Appointment very quickly instead of waiting for a letter to be posted. On other occasions I have not receive my appointment letters or relevant information”

# Moving forward

The rollout has been a great success and staff are so pleased with the findings from the survey that they have set an ambitious goal to get to 80% digital adoption and are confident that it can be reached.

The Trust are currently live with inpatient leaflets for 3 specialities, and are now on the way to getting the rest on board with digital letters and leaflets.

NLaG is also one of the first to pilot the new NHS App functionality with the HC portal integration, transforming the way patients access and manage their appointments using a critical tool in tackling the elective care backlog.



**"I just wanted to give some feedback on the patient portal - it is excellent. So easy to use and time saving!"**

Wendy, Ophthalmology Patient

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**Get in touch with someone from our experienced team to learn more about how we can support transformation at your Trust.**

Call 0845 9000 890 or email us at [enquiries@healthcomm.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthcomm.uk).



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**"The patient engagement portal will help us to provide increased personalised care for our patients.**

**We know that we will never reach 100% of patients digitally, but we hope to reach as many people as possible so they can reap the many benefits that digital communication can provide.**

**Afterall, we owe it to them to deliver the best possible care and good communication is an enabler of this."**

Jackie France,  
Associate Director for Patient Services