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Advice on how to establish a remote 'total triage' model in general practice using online consultations

This guidance is correct at the time of publishing. However, as it is subject to updates, please use the hyperlinks to confirm the information you are disseminating to the public is accurate. Any changes since version 2 (April 2020) are highlighted in yellow.

Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NHS England and NHS Improvement have produced this guide to support all general practices in England with the rapid implementation of a ‘total triage’ model using telephone and online consultation tools.

Total triage means that every patient contacting the practice first provides some information on the reasons for contact and is triaged before making an appointment. It is possible to do this entirely by telephone but using an online consultation system is likely to leverage further efficiency and benefit. Total triage is important to reduce avoidable footfall in practices and protect patients and staff from the risks of infection. This information accompanies a [walkthrough webinar](#).

Key messages

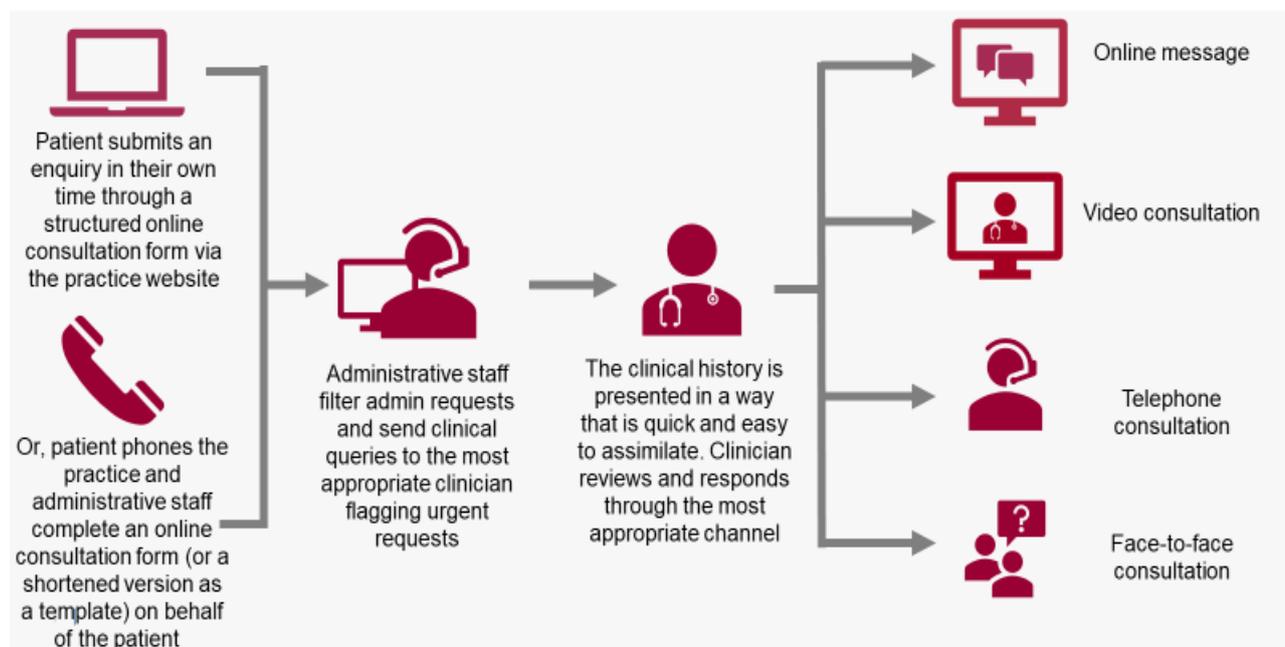
- All practices should be using a total triage model to protect patients and staff from avoidable risks of infection.
- All practices must have access to an online consultation system to support triage.
- Patient requests should be triaged wherever possible to decide on what the most appropriate mode of care delivery is for that patient and to enable care to be provided by the right healthcare professional with the right level of urgency.
- Practices should continue to provide remote consultations (online, phone, video) alongside face to face care for those that need it. The approach should be tailored to the person, the circumstance and their needs.
- Information for patients about how they can access services should be clear; with explanation of triage, the modes of communication available to them and reassurance that face to face care always remains available when clinically appropriate and provided in line with the [standard operating procedure](#) to keep patients and staff safe.
- There is no one size fits all approach. Adjustments will need to be made to ensure those who are unable to access or engage with services remotely can still access appointments and care. Digital channels should be available alongside other routes to access services (telephone, in-person).
- The number of face-to-face contacts that a patient requires should be minimised by co-ordinating care so that as much as possible is done in a single consultation.
- In general, online pre-bookable appointments should not be used so that all demand goes through triage, however, there may be some exceptions to this - such as flu clinics.
- Practices should continue to encourage use of other online patient-facing services, e.g.

repeat prescription ordering and patient access to medical records.

- Appointments made available to NHS 111 for direct booking should be set up as remote appointment slots or as an un-timed 'worklist' to enable further clinical review by the practice.
- Implementation resources and capacity are available to ensure practices and primary care networks (PCNs) are fully supported to deliver the changes required for a successful total triage model and optimisation of digital first pathways. These can be accessed by contacting your CCG or your NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team via england.digitalfirstprimarycare@nhs.net

Dr Minal Bakhai, Deputy Director and National Clinical Lead for Digital First Primary Care,
NHS England and NHS Improvement | General Practitioner

This is the recommended model for practices to move to, enabling requests to enter through a single workflow and matching the approach for providing care to the person, the circumstance and their needs.



Moving to a total triage model may represent a significant change in how a practice or PCN functions. To deliver any change like this successfully, it is essential to consider organisational culture and to support people through the change process. Resilience resides in teams, particularly in complex and ambiguous times. It is important to remain flexible and supportive of one another in order to realise benefits and build effective new ways of working.