



## Case Study

# ► Darwen Healthcare

## Our Digital Journey

Darwen Healthcare is a large GP practice, located in Blackburn, Lancashire, supporting a practice population of around 13,000 patients. The practice workforce includes five partner GPs and one salaried GP, alongside a team including: Advanced Nurse Practitioners, Physician Associates, Paramedic Practitioner, Practice Nurses, Assistant Practitioner, Training Assistant Practitioner, Healthcare Assistants, Reception and Administrative staff.

Darwen Healthcare has been one of the pioneers of the Digital Exemplar Programme and has been working on developing the use of digital technologies since 2018.

## Why did you engage with the Digital Exemplar Programme?

At the outset, the practice wanted to understand the barriers to patients attending appointments, in particular patients with chronic long-term conditions.

They embarked on a programme of consultation with the patient participation group and the wider practice patients through SMS text messages and this allowed Darwen Healthcare to understand that their traditional practice systems could be adapted to better enable provision of extended hours delivery to patients who were not able to access the available appointments



*“We found out that one cohort of patients who might engage with digital more were patients who had depression and anxiety because sometimes they don’t want to or don’t feel comfortable coming into the practice. Actually, being able to facilitate a remote appointment, where they feel comfortable was a good starting point”*



Alongside this, the practice was considering if some routine appointments could be carried out digitally to create more flexibility for staff and save time for patients who struggle to travel into practice, during standard working hours.

## About the Digital Exemplar Programme

### The Community

Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS) and NHS England Primary Care Transformation Team developed the concept of a ‘Digital Exemplar Programme’ to support a primary care approach to enhance digital capabilities across primary care.

### The Problem

Increasing demand pressures placed on general practice are leaving many with unmanageable workloads. Successive health policies have tried to address this through a focus on digital transformation. However, the reality of implementing a digital-first service is challenging and progress has been patchy and often not properly integrated, significantly limiting the benefits.

### The Solution

The ICS and partners recognised that digital healthcare is not simply about making new and emerging technologies available to healthcare teams. It requires consistent quality upskilling and support for front line and administrative staff and support from senior management across the system. It therefore developed a network of practices to work together, with external support, to consult, test and pilot new technologies in practice and assess the impact and share learning.

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## Implementing Digital Solutions

Inspired by the Digital Exemplar Programme, over the past 18 months, the practice has implemented a range of digital solutions to communicate with patients, to simplify appointments and to move to more digital consultations.

Starting with the adoption and promotion of iPlato's myGP application (online consultation platform), the aim was to increase the number of registered online patients to be above the 30% GMS online target. In achieving this, they anticipated a reduction in practice workload, improved efficiency and an improved patient experience.

The practice utilised the support offered through the Digital Exemplar Programme to enhance their social media and patient communication channels to engage patients in the digital journey. They now have 650+ Facebook followers, creating a great communication platform to patients.



*"When we are planning on doing a patient campaign via SMS Text Messages, we now promote on Facebook ahead of the bulk messaging so that patients know it is a genuine message from the practice and promoting important information."*



Further digital engagement with patients was achieved by switching the Patient Participation Group meetings to virtual meetings using MS Teams and Zoom and by delivering the patient survey via digital channels.



*"Whilst we found that face-face PPGs are really proactive, we're actually getting more attending the virtual PPG"*



Alongside this, the practice was focused on 'getting buy in' to digital working across all practice staff. This was achieved through utilising 'digital champions' to test and promote digital solutions.

The practice now operates a total triage system that encourages the option of patient video consultations using Accurx and the use of the Online consultation module of myGP to carry out patient reviews for chronic disease management, dermatology assessments etc and offers tailored SMS messaging to engage defined demographic groups.

## New Ways of Working

"Initially, one of the blockers in the practice for moving to digital was me [Business Manager]. I thought it would mess up our appointment structure and that clearly wasn't the case. Two of my managers said, 'just believe us, it will work.' So, we went with it"



## Digital Solutions

### Hardware

- Laptops and iPads
- Dual screens
- Visconn TV unit
- Digital display system

### Software

- iPlato products
- MS Teams
- Zoom
- Facebook
- Accurx

### Support

- Digital Exemplar Programme
- iPlato
- NHS England, CCG, ICS
- Redmoor Health
- Pennine Lancashire Training Hub

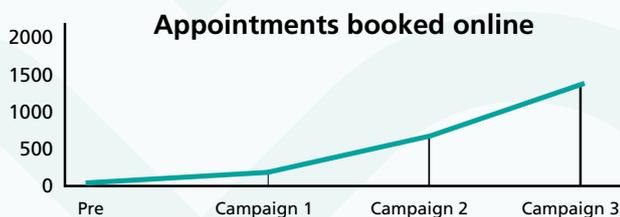
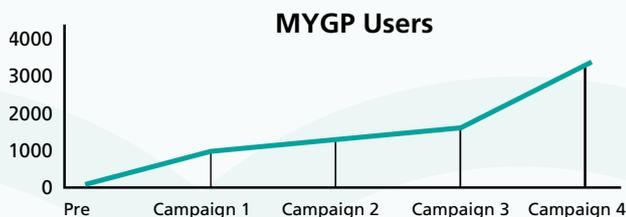
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## Impact of Digital Solutions

The digital promotion and subsequent significant uptake of the myGP app has provided considerable benefits for the practice administration team for managing appointment booking and cancellations, freeing resource to be utilized on other tasks.

The amount of clinical appointments cancelled then reallocated after sending an SMS reminder has enabled appointments slots to be extended to allow more clinician time with the patient and improve patient satisfaction.



Whilst Covid-19 dramatically increased the uptake of video consultations, prior involvement in the exemplar programme enabled the practice to rapidly move, at scale, to video consultation meaning that the practice was better equipped to cope with the effects of the pandemic. Both patient and practice familiarity with video consultation ensured that patients could see their clinician rather than having to engage in a telephone consultation, creating better patient experiences and outcomes.



*"I have a nurse who's shielding at the moment. She's working totally remotely, by digital all day and full-time and has been for the last three months. Whilst Covid had made her work differently, she was already familiar with digital, so was able to engage with patients who were actually having to shield themselves. They were able to converse a lot more because they understood how it was. I think it's really quite powerful."*



## Transforming The Way We Work

"The impact of video consultations for our practice has been phenomenal. From acute presentations to palliative care consultations, we have managed to care for our patients in a safe and efficient manner, often with the help of relatives and carers, whilst reducing the risk of transmission of COVID. We will continue to embrace this new way of working going forward, which gives flexibility to both clinicians and patients, especially those who would normally struggle to come to the practice."

- Dr Hafez, Darwen Health Care



"Digital Appointments can allow a degree of flexibility for staff, for instance if there is bad weather in the winter and they are unable to get in, appointments could be delivered from home which avoids the need of having to contact patients and amend appointment times"



"I've actually adapted most of the clinical sessions on EMIS. At least 75% of them show a property type of video consultation."



## Uptake Of myGP

- ▲ Through the use of targeted campaigns sent out to promote myGP to patients, registered myGP practice users have increased from just nine to over 3,000
- ▲ Online appointment booking has increased from just one to around 2,000



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Better use of digital has allowed the practice to target patients more effectively. It has enabled them to engage patients who would not normally engage with the practice. For example, due to Covid-19, the practice particularly wanted to target respiratory patients and patients who may not have been in for an asthma review for some time



*“Often these patients do not engage with us, but through digital they have actually engaged and have now been consulted, maybe for the first time in a couple of years. We’ve actually met our targets for Asthma and COPD reviews”*



The practice report that the adoption of video appointments has led to a dramatic reduction in ‘failed to attend’ appointments, which is having significant impact on the utilisation of staff resource. The practice is planning a cost analysis of this in the near future.

It is clear that practice-patient engagement has been greatly enhanced through moving the PPG online, creating far greater involvement of service users.



*“Whilst the face-to-face PPG was always really proactive, we are actually getting more patients attending the virtual PPG than we did face-to-face. People actually say more online than they would do if it was a face-to-face.”*



The Annual Patient Survey was delivered electronically in June 2020, receiving over 2,000 responses. One section focused on the patient perspective of digital consultations. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.



*“We asked them, as we start to get through Covid, would they prefer to start coming in for a face-to-face or would they be happy to have the option of the digital appointments? Over 70-80% said they wanted the option of digital appointments.”*



## Impact On The Practice

- ▲ Failed to attend appointments reduced from around 80 to just 10 per month
- ▲ PPG attendance at meetings increased from eight to 14 patients as some existing members were able to access the meeting easier by digital means.

## Patient Feedback

*“I requested an appointment on a Sunday and I’ve actually had it by Monday” - Patient*



*“It’s now easier to have medication reviews, because you do not have to travel to attend your appointment which subsequently only lasts ten minutes” - Patient*



## Patient Survey

- ▲ 95% patient satisfaction with a virtual appointment
- ▲ 99% of surveyed patients preferred an SMS text message to a written appointment request or phone call
- ▲ 90% find using new technology easy
- ▲ 74% do not think they would have achieved better outcomes with face to face appointment rather than video

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## Key Messages

**Take the whole practice with you:** It's critical that you get the full practice engaged and onboard at the outset, not just clinicians. A move towards more digital requires support from the managers, the admin teams, nurses and GP's. They all have critical roles to play and critical insight to offer.

**Engage with the patients at the outset:** Digital cannot just be forced on patients. It's critical that you engage with the patients from the outset. Consult with your patients, via surveys or through the PPG, ask what they think about it and get them to empower other patients.



*"If you don't get patients engaged in the journey, you're not going to make it successful."*



In its simplest form this, may be just SMS text messaging with links to information about digital but consider delivering information to patients on platforms where the patient already engages. Facebook, for example is a great way to communicate.

**Have a clear plan:** Having an agreed and clear plan from the outset is critical. Perhaps starting with a few Digital Champions in the practice in the first instance to test out the digital options and then cascade those across the practice.

**Evaluate what you do:** If you build in evaluation from the outset, you can understand what works and then sell it to others, encouraging other practice staff and other practices in the area to give it a go.



*"If I'm ever looking at anything, if someone's asked me to use something, I would always have a look at somebody else who's using it. If I thought they looked as though they'd got good outcomes, I'd be thinking "do you know what, I want to give that a go as well"."*

*"I'm just incredibly proud of this practice team, they're amazing. I think they work really hard and I think whatever new initiative I suggest to them, they always take it on board. It's really refreshing when you've got a team that are willing to try things even though it may cause some additional work. At the end of the day, we always ask 'will it benefit our patients?' If it does, we should really do it shouldn't we?"*



## Practice Feedback

"Having the technical support from people like iPlato and Redmoor Health has been absolutely amazing for the clinicians and the practice. I can't thank them enough. They have people on standby to help us if we had any issues. This has been key to getting this off the ground" -  
*Ann Neville, Business Manager*

## Acknowledgment

This case study was developed through interview with Ann Neville, Business Manager at Darwen Healthcare. Ann also supplied significant additional data to inform this study, most notably through an in-house case study they produced.

To speak more about the digital journey at Darwen Healthcare contact:  
[ann.neville1@nhs.net](mailto:ann.neville1@nhs.net)

## Author

The case study has been written independently by Mike Parker Progress Health Partnerships

Contact:  
[mike.parker@progresshp.co.uk](mailto:mike.parker@progresshp.co.uk)

## Redmoor Health

Contact:  
[hello@redmoorhealth.co.uk](mailto:hello@redmoorhealth.co.uk)