

# Princes Park Health Centre: Helping patients feel better connected



## OVERVIEW

Digital healthcare in general practice is the new normal, and Princes Park Health Centre is increasing access to online services through the implementation of online consultation solution, Engage Consult.

The practice is better connected and engaged with patients, and with usage continuing to rise, it plans to use Engage Consult to further support high-quality service delivery and improve outcomes for its wide patient base.

## BACKGROUND

Princes Park Health Centre in Eastbourne, West Sussex has a long history dating back to 1925. It has since evolved significantly, supporting 15,000 patients, with a large percentage of patients over 60 years old.

The practice is supported by eight GPs, eight practice nurses, nine health care assistants, plus visiting GPs and other associates. It is also a training practice. The practice manager, and large team of administrators and receptionists, work behind the scenes to ensure its smooth running.

A rapid increase in demand for patient services, alongside the national digital and online service requirements for GP practices, triggered a widespread shift to remote consultations, and acted as the initial drivers for change. Stephanie Williams, practice manager explains, “In response to the Investment and Impact Fund (IFF) scheme to deliver higher quality care, and to meet statutory requirements prompted by the pandemic, our practice chose to implement NHS-preferred supplier, Engage Consult.”

## BENEFITS

- Quick, easy and secure online solution
- Enables patients to contact practice 24/7
- Improves patient engagement
- Signposts patients to NHS trusted self-help information and advice
- Ability to refer patients to other local support services
- Extensive training and support
- Helps manage demand
- Improves efficiencies

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# CHALLENGES

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The Practice continues to maximise the opportunities of Engage Consult, welcoming the convenience and safety of remote consultations, and using it in a way that supports the needs of patients and staff. Yet opening the digital front door to patients has raised specific challenges. Stephanie explains, “Our team was used to working in a certain way, and initially, a new process was daunting. Reactions were mixed. Clinicians welcomed the technological shift, and many loved the new solution, while some admin staff expressed concern that implementing a new digital system would negatively impact workload when capacity is already constrained.”

To facilitate smooth adoption, communication was vital to ensure everyone understood how the new mix of face-to-face and remote appointments would work and how it would change working practices. Stephanie continues, “Educating teams on the benefits of digital transformation remains key. Be open and transparent. My advice for other practices considering implementing Engage Consult is to not be afraid of it! Staff work incredibly hard and are extremely busy throughout the day so for some it may initially feel like a further burden, however there are many positives, and the Engage Health Systems team help navigate all of this, enhancing the digital skills of staff.”

Following implementation, further patient education became essential. “To get the most out of the solution, ensure it’s used effectively and appropriately. On occasions patients have tried to circumnavigate processes which in the long run requires more time and effort all round. Educating patients is important; helping them understand how best to use the solution,” advises Stephanie.

# SOLUTIONS

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Princes Park Health Centre uses Engage Consult as a secure online consultation service, providing patients with an opportunity to request help for non-emergency medical problems at any time, even when the Practice is closed.

A powerful, user-friendly tool, Engage Consult facilitates safe and secure messaging and is used for a combination of routine medical, administration and prescription requests, delivering value to staff and patients to support a high-quality service.

Fully configurable, the Practice customises the hours of operation to meet staffing capacity and demand. As a result, patients are better supported and feel better connected. “Patients use Engage Consult for anything that does not require an immediate emergency response. From admin queries such as following up on a referral letter, to requests for medical problems. Being able to see the requests and queries in advance means we are better prepared which leads to more efficient resolutions,” affirms Stephanie.

The patient portal in Engage Consult accelerates collaboration with other health organisations, enabling patients to be signposted to other services as appropriate, encouraging self-care and the sharing of workload. “Links to established sources of medical information help people self-manage some medical problems.” states Stephanie.



# BENEFITS

For Princes Park Health Centre, Engage Consult facilitates a better, more efficient service by improving patient and GP communication. Using any device, at anytime, patients conveniently book online appointments, check test results, order repeat prescriptions and request access to their GP record, bypassing the need to phone or visit the surgery. “Approximately two thirds are medical requests, and the remainder are admin requests, from individuals, parents, or carers. Almost half of all requests are received between 8 am and 12 pm, with Monday the busiest day,” says Stephanie.

Easy-to-use, secure, and accessible, the solution is used by patients of all ages as Stephanie confirms, “Patients aged from 15 up to 94 use Engage Consult, it’s intuitive and therefore works for everyone; patients are receiving the treatment, care, and support needed in a timely manner.”

The solution is used widely across the practice and staff can access a patient’s medical record at the click of a button. “One GP is allocated each day to go through Engage Consult which works well. Following a weekend there are between 50 and 60, and during the week, it’s capped at 30,” explains Stephanie.

The practice has tapped into the extensive training available too. “Engage Health Systems has been brilliant. Assistance is always there when needed and the support team respond quickly and efficiently,” assures Stephanie.

As the practice continues to raise awareness of the solution with patients, usage figures and understanding of the benefits are increasing. Stephanie continues, “One patient was unhappy with not being able to reach reception via telephone. She wasn’t aware of Engage Consult and once I explained, she really appreciated it and will be using it in the future. We’re always pleased to know that patients are using our online services, saving time for themselves and our practice.”

When people are involved and informed on their health, it can lead to better outcomes. Engage Consult helps to keep people fully engaged with the management of their own health through steering people to the right self-help information and enabling quick referrals to other support services.

## WAY FORWARD

With Engage Consult embedded into daily processes, the practice plans to explore its functionality further. “Improvement and progress are ongoing at the Practice, and to get the best out of our remote consulting in the future, there are other features to further explore,” confirms Stephanie.

There are also plans to improve the Practice’s website and in tandem, raise awareness of online consultations. Usage of Engage Consult is expected to increase further as patients move away from traditional methods and discover the benefits of online services.

Stephanie adds, “Along with enhancing access to services on weekends and evenings, we plan to overhaul our website and make information clearer and more accessible to patients. As part of this we plan we aim to increase understanding of Engage Consult with our patients; exploring the most effective ways to reach patients, increase awareness, and encourage more people to register for online services.”

