

The Alt-Con Project:

Alternatives to face to face consultation with GPs



Practice Information Sheet

This document provides an overview of our research programme and what participating will involve for practices. The programme will involve eight practices in total; three in the Bristol area, three in the Oxford area, and two in Lothian, Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Background

Communications technologies are routinely used by the public in everyday life, and there is an expectation that this should extend to healthcare.

Evidence to date has assessed the potential impact of some alternatives on clinical outcomes, but research so far has been limited. There has also been a focus on obtaining speculative opinions from both patients and healthcare professionals on whether and how they would use these alternatives. What the existing literature does not tell us is under what conditions, with which patients and in which ways alternative methods of consultation actually work, and what advantages and disadvantages might they have for different groups of patients.

We are conducting a study to explore whether doing consultations by phone or using email or Skype, instead of having to go to the surgery to see the doctor face to face, may be better for patients and the staff in the health centre. We will also try to understand under what circumstances such alternatives might be better, and for whom.

Study aim

To understand how, under what conditions, for which patients, and in what ways, alternatives to face to face (F2F) consultations may offer benefits to patients and practitioners in general practice and to use this understanding to develop recommendations for general practices and a framework for subsequent definitive evaluation

Who is funding and carrying out the project?

The Project is funded by the National Institute of Health Research and the University of Bristol is leading this project, along with The Universities of Oxford, Edinburgh and Exeter. The study will take place in eight practices in and around Bristol, Oxford, Lothian, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

This study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee Yorkshire and the Humber – South Yorkshire on the 23 March 2015.

More about the research programme

The programme of research has been funded by the National Institute of Health Research and is a collaboration between researchers at the Universities of Bristol, Oxford, Edinburgh and Exeter.



The study will be seeking to explore the experiences and views of clinicians and other practice staff, including receptionists, to understand the alternatives to F2F consultations that have been tried in different practices, why and how these were introduced, key factors which affect how they are implemented, and intended benefits for patients, clinicians and/or practices. We will explore assumptions about how the alternative forms of contact might lead to benefits and what are the concerns related to using these alternatives.

We will interview patients to explore advantages/disadvantages of alternatives to F2F consultation, and how different forms of communication impact on the consultation and relationships between patients and clinicians. We will purposively select patients with different characteristics (e.g. age, deprivation, long term conditions). A key focus will be the impact of alternative forms of access on different patient groups and whether they increase or reduce access inequalities.

We will observe how practices record details of consultations not delivered F2F and, if possible, use routine anonymous data to quantify this, analysing the number of patients using these alternatives, how this has changed over time, and in particular take-up by different patient groups.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part in this project as a practice will require you to:

- Enter into a Practice Agreement confirming the roles and responsibilities of the practice and [INSERT UNIVERSITY NAME]
- Allow the researchers to observe practice, including observation of consultations (with patient and clinician consent), and participate in informal conversations with the practice staff
- Permit members of the research team access to the practice to conduct activities necessary to carry out the research, at times and dates agreed in advance with relevant practice staff.
- Allow the researcher to record their observations in field notes
- Contact the study team promptly if the practice identifies any issues or problems with the study.
- **General Practitioners:**
 - We will invite GP(s) to be interviewed about the practice's use of alternatives to F2F consultation.
 - Identify a GP to attend a stake holder conference
- **Administrative staff:**
 - We will interview practice managerial and reception staff in each case study practice.
 - We will work with them to create summary profiles of the types of alternative consultations that are (or were) provided.
 - Assist the study team in extracting **anonymous** data on alternative consultations from your practice database.
 - Administrative support to identify suitable patients or carers to invite to interview and conduct a mail out to these patients on behalf of and with the help of the study team.

- **Wider team:**

- We will conduct interviews (face-to-face or telephone) with other team members associated with the practice such as practice-based and community-based nurses, pharmacists, and allied health professionals (such as phlebotomists, community-based physiotherapists).

How long will involvement last?

The research will be conducted between July 2015 and April 2016 to complete the observational work and to conduct interviews until enough data has been collected in the practice.

Practice reimbursement

A process is in place for practices to receive financial reimbursement for conducting Alt-Con project research activity. The amount the practice can claim will be agreed by the NIHR Comprehensive Local Research Network and will be paid by [INSERT UNIVERSITY NAME]. These costs include:

Activity	Payments
GP time for first 2 set-up visits each lasting 1 hour	£160 (i.e., £80 per visit)
Practice manager time for first 2 set-up visits each lasting 1 hour	£44 (i.e., £22 per visit)
Time for 2 administrative staff to help with searches for eligible patients to invite for interviews – up to 4 hours	Maximum of £160 (i.e., £20 per staff member per hour)
Reimbursement for at least 1/2 GP's time to conduct a qualitative interview	£80 per GP interviewed
Reimbursement of the practice manager/senior reception staff's and wider team's time to conduct a qualitative interview	£22 per member of staff interviewed

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

Your experiences will contribute towards an increased understanding of how doing consultations by phone or using email or Skype, instead of having to go to the surgery to see the doctor face to face, affects patients and the staff in the health centre. We can then use this information to produce a website to inform those working in GP practices to decide whether they should do something similar and if so how and for whom. There is also the potential that the findings could lead to a further study into the use of alternatives.

Making a complaint

If you take part and are unhappy with any aspect of this project, you can write to:

Avon Primary Care Research Collaboration, Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group, 6th Floor, South Plaza, Marlborough Street, Bristol BS1 3NX

In your letter, please provide as much detail about the project as possible, the name of the researcher and indicate the nature of your complaint.

For more information about the study

Visit the Alt-Con Project website: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alt-con/>

Email: sscm-alt-con@bristol.ac.uk



[INSERT NAME AND DETAILS OF THE LOCAL RESEARCHER]

We thank you kindly for your time and involvement in the project.