Implementing video consultations in NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts: Frequently Asked Questions

14 April 2020

NHS England and NHS Improvement

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Introduction

NHS England and NHS Improvement has accelerated work to transform the way outpatient appointments are delivered in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. We are working to rapidly scale up video consultation capability within NHS trusts and foundation trusts to reduce unnecessary physical attendances.

This document addresses the most commonly asked questions providers may have about using video consultations in secondary care. The document includes some information that is specific to Attend Anywhere, the video consultation platform nationally funded by NHS England and NHS Improvement to support NHS trusts and foundation trusts in their response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Video consultations in the NHS

What is a video or virtual consultation?

A video consultation is an appointment that takes place between a patient and a clinician over video, as opposed to face-to-face or over the telephone.

On the Attend Anywhere platform, additional participants, including carers, interpreters or other healthcare professionals can also be added to the video consultation as agreed by the patient.

Why is the NHS using video consultations?

The NHS Long Term Plan outlined NHS England and NHS Improvement's commitment to redesigning outpatient appointments, improving patient choice and the opportunity to better deploy clinical resources.

Video consultations:

- Reduce the need for patients to travel to NHS provider sites; saving patients, their families and their carers time and money

- Provides patients with the flexibility to have consultations in a place that is convenient to them, improving patient experience

- Reduces disruption to a patient's day, reducing the amount of time they need to be out of work/school to attend an appointment at an NHS provider site

- Reduces carbon emissions associated with travel

- Reduces the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19, by avoiding unnecessary physical attendances.

Which patients/specialties are video consultations suitable for?

Video consultations are suitable for patients who do not need a physical examination and who are able to communicate via video.

Deciding which patients should be offered a video consultation, rather than a face-to-face appointment, should be clinically led.

Will providers lose out financially by opting for video, rather than face-to-face consultations?

NHS trusts and foundations trusts using video consultations should continue to be reimbursed at the same level as currently agreed with commissioners for face-to-face activity.

COVID-19 Response

How does using video consultations support us with our COVID-19 response?

Using video consultations supports with COVID-19 response by:

- Preventing the transmission of the disease by reducing the need for physical attendances at NHS provider sites

- Enabling clinicians to see patients who are unable to travel to NHS provider sites, this includes patients who are in at risk groups or who need to self-isolate

- Enabling clinicians who are self-isolating but well enough to work, to do so from home, this includes staff in at risk groups, those who are self-isolating or those who experiencing travel difficulties

What is NHS England and NHS Improvement offering to NHS trusts and foundation trusts to support the implementation of video consultations as part of our COVID-19 response?

There are several platforms which are commercially available for conducting video consultations. NHS England and NHS Improvement has procured a 12-month licence for one of these platforms. This gives free access to the Attend Anywhere platform to all NHS secondary care providers in England.

NHS England and NHS Improvement will provide:

- Training and support materials to support rapid deployment

- A nationally assured Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)

- A clinician and patient telephone support desk

- Up to £20,000 of capital funding per NHS provider to support with purchasing hardware to support the use of video consulting technology

Can we use a video consultation platform that is not Attend Anywhere?

Yes, if you have found another platform that works for you and your patients, we would encourage you to use it. Using another platform does not affect your eligibility for the Attend Anywhere licence, you can use both platforms at the same time.

We are using a platform that is not Attend Anywhere, are we still eligible for the £20,000 fund for hardware?

Yes, the £20,000 of capital funding is available to support providers who are implementing or already using any video consulting technology to purchase any hardware they need as part of their response to COVID-19.

What materials are available to support providers to implement video consultations?

NHS England and NHS Improvement have produced a range of support materials for NHS providers who are implementing video consultations. This includes a one-week implementation guide to support providers to have their first patient video consultation within one week of using Attend Anywhere. Regional Implementation Leads will have local arrangements in place to share all relevant resources with you.

Getting access to the Attend Anywhere platform

How can we get a licence to use the Attend Anywhere platform that NHS England and NHS Improvement has funded?

NHS secondary care providers can get access to the Attend Anywhere platform by signing a sub-licence agreement with NHS Improvement. Contact your NHS England and NHS Improvement Regional Implementation Lead to get access to the relevant paperwork.

How do we get staff set up on the Attend Anywhere platform?

Once Attend Anywhere has been deployed to your organisation staff will need to contact the provider's project lead or platform administrator who will manage platform access. Administrators are asked to follow the 'Attend Anywhere best practice administration guide' to ensure we moderate the load on the platform at a time that many providers are rapidly increasing their usage.

What equipment do patients or staff need for an Attend Anywhere consultation?

Patients and staff can access video consultations on a smartphone, tablet or laptop/computer. Inbuilt microphones and cameras can be used, but best results are achieved using an external headset and web camera.

Attend Anywhere consultations are accessed via a web browser and do not require any applications to be downloaded. Supported browsers include Chrome, Safari.

The platform works best over wi-fi but a 3G or 4G mobile data connection can also be used.

What infrastructure do we need in place to use Attend Anywhere? For example, does the platform run over HSCN or public internet or either?

A technical support guide has been produced by Attend Anywhere which covers many technical and infrastructure aspects.

The platform can run over HSCN. It is important to also consider the other applications that a clinician might need access to, such as your Patient Administration System (PAS)/Electronic Patient Referral system (EPR), as this may determine whether you wish to access the Attend Anywhere platform via HSCN or public internet.

Using video consultations with patients

How should we inform patients about their video consultation?

Patients can be informed about their video consultation as they would be for any other appointment. This can be via email, text or letter. Some NHS providers using the Attend Anywhere platform direct patients to their website where there is a link to the video consultation web page, which acts as a front door. Alternatively, a link that is specific to the appropriate waiting area can be shared with the patient.

Do we need consent from the patient before undertaking a video consultation?

You may obtain implied or explicit consent from the patient. The provision of sufficient, accurate information is an essential part of seeking consent. This can be given to the patient before their appointment or as they are joining the video consultation, e.g. via the provider's website.

Consent is a process, not a one-off event, and it is important that this is reflected in how video consultations are deployed (for example, if there is a sound issue with the call, the patient may wish to stop the consultation). This should be reflected in providers' Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

For providers using Attend Anywhere, patients are asked to accept the Attend Anywhere terms of use and provider's privacy policy before starting a video consultation. The provider can also add a short notice that will be shown to all patients before starting their video consultation.

How will patients be supported to use Attend Anywhere platform?

Providers should put processes in place to ensure that they can support patients to effectively access and use their available video consultation platforms.

For providers using the Attend Anywhere platform, patient support materials including a patient information leaflet and troubleshooting guide have been produced. We recommend that providers using other platforms adapt these resources to meet their needs.

Using the Attend Anywhere platform

On the Attend Anywhere platform, how will the clinician know who is waiting to be seen and who they are going to be treating?

The patient will wait in a designated virtual waiting area. The clinician can see the number of patients waiting and how long each patient has been waiting for. When the clinician is ready for the consultation they will "pick up" the patient and will verify the patient's identity at the start of the virtual consultation in the same way they would in a face-to-face appointment, using information provided by the patient.

The clinician can choose to receive notifications on their phone to alert them when a patient is waiting in the waiting room by choosing the alert function on the platform.

Can multiple clinicians be assigned to the same waiting area on Attend Anywhere?

Yes. A waiting area can replicate the workflows of a physical clinic.

What happens if a patient comes to the wrong online waiting area on the Attend Anywhere platform?

A patient can be moved to the correct waiting area by users who have the right permissions. Each provider will be required to set up a process to manage this risk.

What happens if a patient comes to the waiting area but does not have an appointment on the Attend Anywhere platform?

You can send the patient a notification to advise them that they do not have an appointment. Alternatively, providers can remove a patient from the waiting area by joining the call with them and then selecting the 'end the call for all users' option.

Can the clinician notify the patient if they are running late on the Attend Anywhere platform?

Yes. This can be done by selecting the patient from the waiting area and then clicking the notify button. This can also be done by a service manager/administrator if they are supporting the management of a waiting area.

What happens if the call drops out in the middle of a consultation on the Attend Anywhere platform?

The clinician or patient should click the green 'refresh' button. The consultation will be refreshed. The patient will not lose their place in the clinic.

Do clinics have to be booked or can they be drop in on the Attend Anywhere platform?

The Attend Anywhere platform supports both clinic types. However, providers will need to consider any supporting booking templates they may need in their PAS for the process to work effectively (e.g. for appointment coding or booking processes). Further details are in the provider implementation guide and supporting materials.

What times are online clinics available to patients on the Attend Anywhere platform?

Providers can determine what hours they operate video consultations. These times need to be added to the waiting room settings. If patients try to access a clinic waiting room outside of the opening hours they will receive a message informing them that the clinic is closed. Providers may also want to include information on clinic times on patient appointment letters and similar documentation.

Can we customise our clinics and waiting areas on Attend Anywhere?

Providers can customise the information a patient sees when they enter the waiting area such as the contact details should a patient need technical support or need to reschedule their appointment. Waiting rooms can be set up with or without a receptionist. In addition, drop in clinics as well as booked clinics can be set up on the platform.

How much data does a call use on Attend Anywhere?

Patients do not use any data while waiting for a clinician to join them.

A 20-minute video consultation uses about 230MB of data on a mobile device, and 450 MB on a PC or laptop. Data usage is less on lower-speed internet connections, or on a less powerful computer, tablet, or smartphone. However, these factors can also reduce the overall quality of the call. Data use increases when there are more than two participants on the same consultation

Can additional participants join a consultation?

Yes. It is possible to invite a third or fourth person into a consultation such as a family member of the patient, interpreter or another clinician involved in multi-disciplinary care. Additional participation can be planned or unplanned.

If you have prearranged to invite a third party to join a patient consultation you simply share the correct patient URL with the third party, via email, text or letter. Once on the live consultation you can add the third party into the call from the waiting area.

Alternatively, you can invite a participant directly into an in-progress consultation. You can text or email the secure waiting area URL to the additional participant, using the call screen's 'invite' functionality which is accessible on the toolbar at the foot of the screen display. The participant will instantly receive the URL to join the live call.

What additional functionality is available on Attend Anywhere?

During a consultation you and the patient can two-way message via the chat functionality. You can also share your screen with the patient, for example to show test results on your dual screen. The patient can also share their screen with you.

Can I redirect patients to a webpage after the consultation?

Yes. You can set up each waiting area to automatically redirect a patient or clinician to a webpage after the consultation ends. We recommend that each waiting area is set up to redirect patients to complete a short survey to collect patient feedback.

Does the Attend Anywhere platform interface with Patient Administration Systems?

No. The attending clinician will need to ensure consultation notes are captured in the patient's notes and/or on the provider's PAS in the same way as for any other consultation.

Can we integrate Attend Anywhere with our Electronic Patient Referral (EPR) system or launch it from the EPR?

Providers on the NHS England and NHS Improvement video consultation pilot have been exploring this. Basic integration has taken place in some places by including clinic or webpage links in appointment letters/emails/SMS.

Can the clinician access PAS or patient notes if they are undertaking a virtual consultation whilst working remotely?

Providers will need to ensure that staff who are undertaking virtual clinics from home or away from their main site have remote access and are supported to use the platform from other locations. Providers will also need to ensure that staff have access to other systems such as PAS, as required and as appropriate.

Clinicians using the Attend Anywhere platform, who are accessing provider systems via virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), may need access to the Attend Anywhere platform via their own computer's web browser (Chrome or Safari) and not the browser within the VDI window. This will depend on the VDI settings and options. Using the computer's web browser will enable the clinician's camera, microphone and speaker to work for the call.

What is the maximum number of staff users that can be online at once on the Attend Anywhere platform?

There is no limit on the number of concurrent users. It is recommended that providers carry out their own load testing arrangements to identify the 'comfortable' maximum number of concurrent users. This may vary between providers depending on their network connectivity.

Is it possible to embed the Attend Anywhere 'Start Video Call' Button on our website?

It is possible to embed the Attend Anywhere button on provider websites. Guidance on how to do this is contained within the guidance materials. Contact your NHS England and NHS Improvement Regional Implementation Leads for more information.

Who should I contact if I experience any technical issues or queries with the Attend Anywhere platform?

Local IT support will be your first point of contact for any technical issues or queries. Each provider is asked to identify this IT resource and put processes in place to support the accelerated implementation of video consultations.

Any technical issues or queries that cannot be resolved locally can be escalated to the national support help desk currently being developed. Please email issues and queries to nhsi.videoconsultsupport@nhs.net

Training

What training is available for provider staff to learn how to use the Attend Anywhere platform?

Regional Implementation Leads are running online demonstration and training sessions and will share relevant guides and resources with users.

Providers can set up their own test waiting area once they have access to the platform. The test area can be used by colleagues as a practice area, helping them to build their confidence using the platform.

Does the Attend Anywhere platform include a demonstration environment or capability?

Providers can work on Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) to ensure the configuration and hardware is appropriate. A technical specification for providers is available via your Regional Implementation Leads.

Data Protection and Reliability

Is the Attend Anywhere platform secure?

The platform has an inbuilt three tier security system. Patient identifiable information is not stored by the system. The platform has been used in Scotland since 2017 and has been used by several providers in England as part of a national pilot which began in 2018.

Is there a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for providers to use for implementing the Attend Anywhere platform?

NHS Improvement have compiled a DPIA, in conjunction with Attend Anywhere. The DPIA has been approved on behalf of NHS Improvement's Senior Information Risk Owner.

The DPIA (also known as privacy impact assessment or PIA) is an assessment tool used to identify, assess and mitigate any actual or potential risks to privacy created by a proposed or existing process or project that involves the use of personal data of staff and/or patients. Providers may use this template assessment to rapidly process through local information governance risk management procedures. Please request the DPIA via your Regional Implementation Lead.

Understanding the impact to the individual(s) personal data enables the system to be designed around their legal rights and expectations of confidentiality and helps providers identify the most effective way to comply with their data protection obligations and meet individuals' expectations of privacy. An effective DPIA also allows providers to identify and fix problems at an early stage, reducing the associated costs and damage to reputation which may otherwise occur.

How is patient data used by the Attend Anywhere platform?

Only limited personal data is entered to enable the patient to access the consultation platform. This includes the patient's phone number, date of birth and name although these do not all have to be mandatory fields (this can be adjusted in settings). This data is deleted within an hour of the consultation ending. No patient data is stored within the system.

Are video consultations or images recorded or stored by the Attend Anywhere platform?

Consultations are not recorded, and images are not captured by Attend Anywhere. No data or information relating to the patient or their consultation is retained by Attend Anywhere.

Is there enough capacity in the Attend Anywhere platform to cope with the increased demand?

Yes. We are working with Attend Anywhere, to ensure there is platform stability and sufficient concurrent call capacity to cope with the growth in demand we may see due to the pace of the roll out. This will include load and platform resilience testing activities undertaken by a third party.

Administrators are asked to follow the Attend Anywhere best practice administration to ensure we moderate the load on the platform at a time that many providers are rapidly increasing their usage. The guidance will be reviewed and updated iteratively as the load on the platform begins to ease.

It is important providers test local network capacity and remind clinicians who may work from home to ensure that they test their home broadband speed to ensure they are sufficient before undertaking live video consultations with patients. The 'test call' functionality available before a call is a useful check to undertake. Providers and clinicians can also undertake a more thorough test via this link Testing WebRTC network readiness.

It should also be noted that video call quality may also be affected by the very high demand currently being placed on the internet because of COVID-19.