

Online Consultations: Contractual Obligations

Sheffield
LMC



GUIDANCE FOR SHEFFIELD GPs

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In April and May 2021 there were a number of local and national enquiries about online GP services and what contractual obligations are required. GP online services are part of the NHS Long Term Plan and are [contractual](#) as of October 2021.

The expectations of the digital offer are outlined in [Primary care SDF and GPIT funding guidance](#). They are fully set out in Annex C of the [NHS England and NHS Improvement \(NHSE/I\) letter](#) issued in January 2021:

We confirm the definition of the core digital offer which all practices must provide to patients is already the norm in the vast majority of practices. This is as follows:

- Offer and promote to registered patients a facility for providing their personal or contact information, or informing the practice of a change to that information.
- Offer and promote an online consultation tool to its registered patients.
- Offer and promote (where appropriate) to its registered patients a relevant electronic communication method.
- Offer and promote to its registered patients the facility of participating in their consultations with the contractor by video conference where appropriate.
- Ensure there are links on its website or profile which direct people to its online consultation tool, and the symptom checker and self-care information available on the NHS website(20).

For online consultations and video consultations, practices will need to not only install online and video consultation tools but also use them ordinarily. Practices should be enabled with the tools and functionality, as part of commissioners' infrastructure responsibilities.

NHSE/I note: "While the ambition is for patients to be able to make requests via an online system at a time that suits them, as this is likely to be more convenient for patients and may increase patient satisfaction, there may be circumstances where this is not possible and practices need to limit access." However, they also recognise: "If a practice takes the decision to switch off its online consultation tool outside core hours, this can be done by the practice or by contacting the relevant supplier, depending on the tool in use. Practices should also inform their commissioner so additional support can be provided and wider issues around capacity and demand can be considered."

Therefore, it is important for practices to continue using and developing online consultation tools to suit the needs of their patients. However, core general practice hours are 08:00 to 18:30 Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays), and practices can turn off their online tools outside of these hours as long as they have informed the commissioner that they are doing so. Sheffield GP practices should inform NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) via syicb-sheffield.primarycare@nhs.net.