

"Patient Partner from Voice Connect has been specifically developed to solve day to day communications problems experienced in General Practice. An elegant, cost effective solution that benefits patients and staff alike"

'Patient Partner is a marvellous system' says Kingthorne Group Practice



Kingthorne Group Practice use Patient Partner to give their patients a helping hand

First opened in 1919, the Kingthorne Group Practice in Doncaster now consists of two surgeries: the main surgery in the town centre and a branch surgery in Edenthorpe, which was once a village on the outskirts of Doncaster but which has become subsumed by the growth of the town. The practice is a substantial size, with a total of 9,300 patients of mixed demography on its list. There are six partners, one registrar and one F2 currently at the practice, plus four nurses and twelve reception and administrative staff.

Patient access is a problem for many GP surgeries and is also an issue that has been identified by the government. Senior staff at the Kingthorne Group Practice decided to install an automated appointment booking system in order to reduce the number of calls into the reception team and

to offer their patients increased flexibility in making appointments. "We felt that using Patient Partner would enable us to give our patients a better service, as well as reducing pressure on our reception team," explains Practice Manager, Alison Maw. "We were keen to offer them the opportunity to book their appointments at any time of day as we felt this would improve patient access. However, we did have some concerns prior to going ahead, mainly about how much our patients would use the system."

"Since we have been using Patient Partner, the number of calls coming in to reception has significantly reduced"

Fortunately, this concern has been allayed by a very positive response from the patients, although Alison admits that they are eager to continue encouraging a greater uptake of the service. "The patients who have used Patient Partner really love it: they find the ease of use great. We do need to continue promoting the service to our patients and are currently using our flu vaccine sessions as an opportunity to do this."





Healthcare in the area has changed a great deal since the practice opened in 1919

Alison reports that Patient Partner has really come into its own since they installed SystemOne in June 2009 (a service which integrates with Patient Partner and enables patients to also book appointments online), and that the two systems complement each other well. Using the two services in conjunction has had a very positive impact on the day to day running of the practice. In terms of improving the patient experience, Alison feels that Patient Partner has achieved the original objective of making it easier for them to contact both surgeries. She also believes that using the system has improved patient access and satisfaction.

From a staff perspective, Patient Partner has improved the whole process of call handling, meaning that the receptionists now have more time to attend to other areas of patient care. "Since we have been using Patient Partner, the number of calls coming in to reception has significantly reduced," comments Alison. "We hope to continue this trend as patients become more aware of the system. It also has the added benefit of enabling patients to cancel appointments at the weekend so we are aware first thing on Monday morning of any appointments that have become available over the weekend."

Patient Partner's best three features are:

- 1. Ease of use: no special passwords etc. are needed; the patients can just use it**
- 2. The system is available 24 hours a day**
- 3. It frees up reception time**

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Now that Patient Partner has bedded in so well, Alison has also made some suggestions for ways in which the system could be developed still further to accommodate the varying demands of the practice, which have been taken on board by Voice Connect. "I mentioned that it would be helpful if there was a way of enabling different nurse appointments to be selected related to a time length," she comments. "So the staff at Voice Connect have been working with us to facilitate this and we hope to have this up and running shortly. In fact, the support from Voice Connect has been very good throughout."

Alison feels that the difference that Patient Partner has made to the practice is significant, with the potential to become even more widely used. "Patient Partner is a marvellous system that enables patients to have better access to appointments – you just need to ensure that you get the message over to all the patients so they can take advantage of the system," she says. "If a surgery with similar issues to ours was considering installing Patient Partner, I would advise them to promote the system and go for it."



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