

Steps to move towards increased use of telephone consultations:

Below is a guide to the main steps to establish telephone consults. There are four steps to prepare, each with a description of how this could work for your practice. This guide aims to help you:

1. Communicate to your patients
2. Control appointment bookings
3. Triage patients seeking appointments
4. Provide telephone consultations instead of face to face where appropriate

Communicate to your patients

When changing the process of booking an appointment you need to let your patients know:

- How the process is different and why
- What they can expect in terms of access and care

It is recommended that the following script is sent to all patients via SMS by Monday (March 23):

COVID-19 and appointments.

In order to keep you well, and to avoid unnecessary contact with people who may be unwell, appointments will only be available by ringing us. If you turn up at our practice without an appointment you will not be seen.

When you phone us we will schedule an appointment at the practice or may instead arrange a telephone appointment

Normal fees will apply.

When patients call for an appointment this needs to be briefly explained to them. It needs to be clear if they are to attend the practice or if they need to stay home and wait for the GP to call.

It is recommended that the same message is posted on all patient facing media e.g. practice website and social media pages. This will also need to be clear on the portal if you have one.

Change your automated phone message to include the following: "If you are concerned you or a family member may have Coronavirus symptoms it is important that you do not come into the medical centre. Please call 0800 358 5453 to speak to a health professional who can advise you specifically on Coronavirus."

Control appointment bookings

To avoid patients simply presenting at the practice without a telephone assessment it is recommended that the appointment booking function on the patient portal is either inactivated or set so the patient has to state the reason for the visit. If the option to self-book remains then the GP or nurse will need to check the bookings in advance to be able to assess the need for a face to face

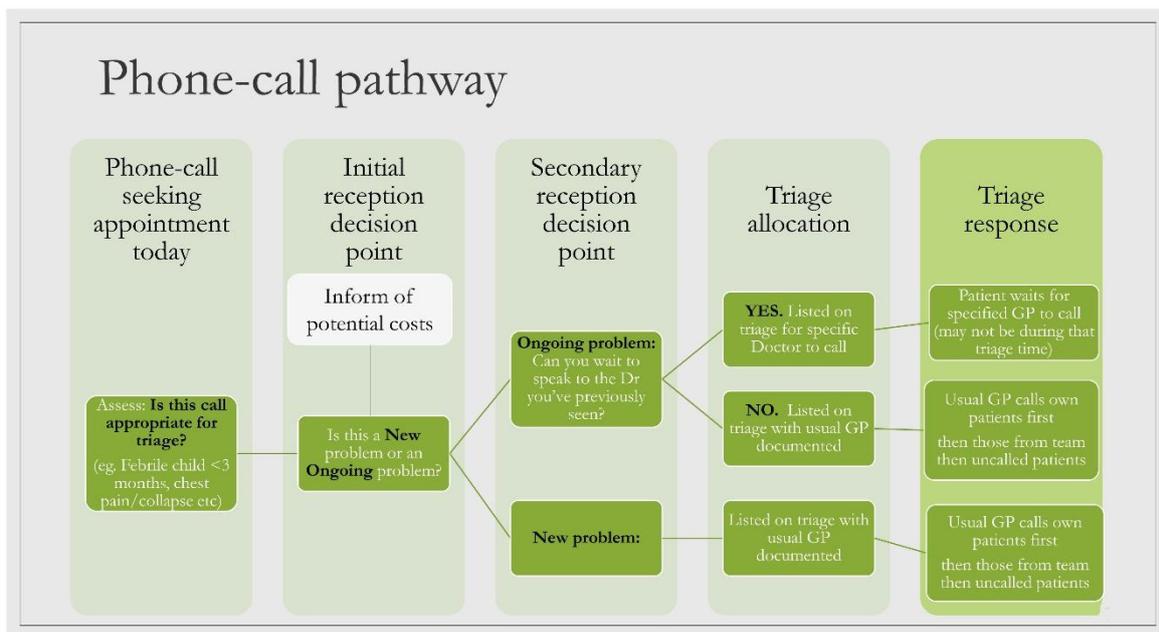
versus a telephone consult. The patient will need to be advised as to which type of consult they will get.

The ability to request scripts should be activated and remain activated to prevent unnecessary visits for repeat scripts.

Triage Patients seeking urgent or same day appointment

All patients seeking urgent appointments should be triaged by a clinician with prescribing rights. This may be expanded to all patients seeking appointments if the practice has capacity to do so.

A phone call pathway is attached as an example.



A clinical triage advanced form is being prepared to support and guide the triage process.

- Patients calling for an appointment should be asked to state the reason for the visit and whether it is urgent.
 - If a patient is not willing to say why they need to be seen, you could respond with:

“Due to the current situation with Coronavirus, we need to ask all patients their reason for attending. All information given is confidential. We appreciate your co-operation.”
 - Another helpful line when patients need to be triaged before booking:

“Due to the high demand for appointments, we are needing to triage and book according to urgency. Thank you for understanding.”
- The reception team can then either put the call through to the triage clinician or take the patients’ number and let them know the clinician will call them back.
- The patient details are then passed on the triage clinician for call back and phone assessment.
- The clinician can then call the patient to assess their need. If possible the issue should be dealt with in that call if it can be, but the triage call needs to be succinct so this may not be possible.

- If the patient need is urgent then the clinician will decide where the patient needs to be seen or when the patient can have a consultation, and what type of consultation it will be. This needs to be explained clearly to the patient to avoid confusion.

When booking a consultation for the patient the notes need to identify if the consultation will be by phone or face to face.

Provide telephone consultations

For patients that have been booked in for a telephone consultation then they need to be called at the time of the appointment and on the agreed number.

The consultation will need to appropriate and not require the patient to be physically examined.

This consult may result on the need for referral as per usual processes or may then require a subsequent face to face. The clinician's decision will determine the process.