

5 minutes with... an NHS Admin Team Lead

Maxima Spanakis is the Admin Team Lead at the Luton and Dunstable Rheumatology department for Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

In November 2021, an improved Rheumatology Nurse-led advice line utilising Consultant Connect was launched at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust. The clinical advice line enables patients to access their specialist team to support them with their condition and medication. Calls are answered by administrative assistants Monday-Friday, between 9am-12noon. Since the launch, over 4,000 calls have been answered by the admin team.

Maxima talks to us about what she thinks of the service and how using Consultant Connect for the Nurse-led advice line has improved patient care.

1 Why is Consultant Connect a better tool than the system you had in place before?

Before using Consultant Connect, the admin team used a hospital telephone messaging system. Patients would leave a message on an answerphone between a specified time and then receive a call back later for advice. Maxima explains:

“The new system allows us to be more efficient as a team. With the previous voicemail service, the patients didn’t have that reassurance that their call was being dealt with and so they would also ring the secretaries on a different number and email us as well. This resulted in duplicated queries and several team members working on one patient query depending on the route it took to get into the department. With the new process, via Consultant Connect, patients have that instant reassurance that they’ve spoken to someone and know that their query is being dealt with. I think this a key benefit to the service.”

2 What do you see as the main benefits to your patients?

Using Consultant Connect in this way means patients speak to someone in the team when they call in, and they are reassured they will receive the specialist advice they need. Maxima adds:

“Improved patient satisfaction with the service is the main benefit. From previous feedback from patients, we know that many of them do not like to ring in, only to get through to an answerphone. The feedback we are getting from our patients now on the new system, is that they are getting reassurance through a better experience and they are much happier. It’s much better for them to get through to somebody and have a response to their query rather than having to leave a message and wait for someone in the team to call them back.”

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3 What would you say are the key benefits you've gained since using the Consultant Connect service?

Maxima explains how using Consultant Connect has improved efficiencies within the admin team:

"As a manager, I can see how many calls are coming into the team daily, which helps me manage the staff resource needed to deliver the service. Consultant Connect also enables me to see how much time is spent dealing with patient queries, and this is important especially when there is growth in this area, as there was during COVID. I am able to use the data to demonstrate this to my management team. We are also able to code the calls, via text, after the call so I can really deep dive and see what patients are calling the department for. This allows me to see if there are any other ways we can deal with queries rather than via the telephone advice line, for example via email. It has helped my team manage their time better and has improved overall job satisfaction to those delivering the service because it is more streamlined.

All these tasks used to be completed manually, so to have it collected and collated automatically and sent to me in a report is a significant improvement. I think that has made a significant impact on the team and has freed up time that can be spent on other things to help patient care. We are all striving to make patient care better, and this certainly has helped us work towards that goal."

4 How does having a dedicated Account Manager at Consultant Connect support you with the service?

"It's been amazing to have that dedicated point of contact for support. For every single idea, tweak, or bit of advice that we have needed along the way to improve our service for patients, there has been someone there who responded quickly to what we needed. Service improvement can be challenging, and it can take time to perfect processes, but all of our requests were dealt with promptly with our Account Manager fitting in around our schedules.

It's been great to collaborate with Consultant Connect and share ideas on delivering the best model for the nurse advice line. Their wealth of experience in this field has been invaluable to us. It's been a big change for the team to switch to this model but having an Account Manager facilitating that change has made it easy for us. It's been an efficient process all round. We are now delivering the service we want to our patients, and the whole team are really proud of that."

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