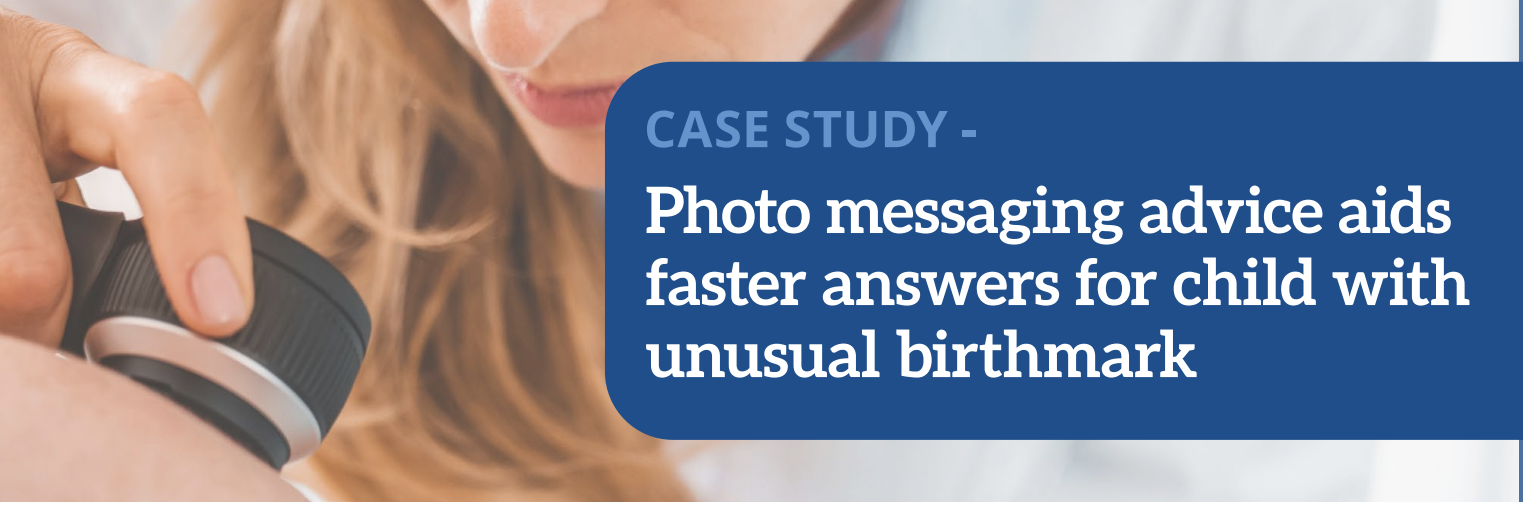


CASE STUDY -

Photo messaging advice aids faster answers for child with unusual birthmark

The launch of **Enhanced Advice & Guidance (A&G)** across NHS Greater Manchester has given clinicians in all **10 localities** rapid access to a wide range of elective care specialties. Provided by out-of-area NHS consultants on the National Consultant Network (NCN), **clinicians can speak directly on the telephone or use photo messaging to share clinical images and receive timely, specialist advice**.

NHS Greater Manchester stats*:

16 Telephone specialties available

39 seconds average call answer time

>400 GP surgeries covered

20 Messaging specialties available

4 hours average message response time

92% first-time connection rate

*Stats correct as of November 2026.

Specialist advice supports clinical decisions

For Dr Lucy Sandhu, a GP Trainee in Manchester, **Consultant Connect provides both a practical clinical resource** and an opportunity to learn directly from experienced specialists:

> 'It's an additional learning tool and therefore **reduces the strain on GP supervisors**, especially if we're understaffed. **It's a helpful way for us to gain more knowledge from a senior consultant**, usually on a very specific topic.'

Kathleen Hartigan, Advanced Clinical Practitioner in Bolton, also uses the service to access specialist advice for patients with complex symptoms and presentations:

> 'Consultant Connect was introduced in October 2025, and **with the advance towards advice-first care, it was even more important that we have this access**.'

Kathleen values **the ability to ask questions and explore management options** before deciding whether a referral is warranted.

> 'I really like Consultant Connect, because sometimes there are queries surrounding a patient who doesn't necessarily require a referral, and **this is a helpful way to get answers, ideas, or suggestions for further tests in the community** before referring.'

A clear treatment plan for an unusual ear infection

Dr Sandhu values the ability to discuss individual cases directly with a consultant, which is particularly **helpful when a patient's presentation doesn't fit neatly into a single definitive diagnosis**.

One patient presented with outer ear pain, discharge, and discomfort. Dr Sandhu suspected a fungal ear infection, but as this wasn't something she encountered frequently, **she wanted to check the appropriate management**.

> 'I spoke with an ENT consultant via Consultant Connect, who advised on the typical treatment, but **also recommended that the patient attend the local hospital for microsuction**.
>
> '**This was good learning for me and a better outcome for the patient**. Additionally, **the consultants are very friendly and supportive, and provide reasonable advice**, with specific answers that are helpful for management plans.'

'The consultants are very friendly and supportive, and provide reasonable advice.'

A faster answer for a child with an unusual birthmark

Photo messaging supports queries that are visual and difficult to describe over the phone. Dr Sandhu used photo messaging to safely send images of a child who presented with a large birthmark. Whilst many birthmarks are benign, **Dr Sandhu wanted advice on whether the appearance warranted further assessment**:

> 'Sometimes birthmarks can be signifiers of disease, especially when they're on the abdomen.
>
> 'In this case, **I was able to send photographs directly to a paediatric consultant and received a rapid response** confirming that the patient should be referred.
>
> 'Previously, **I would have needed to contact the local paediatric team and ask to speak to the on-call doctor**. I didn't feel it was needed in this case because it wasn't urgent, and I couldn't show them a picture of the birthmark for review.
>
> 'I got a reply so quickly that I didn't even have time to check if a response had been received. **The speed of the response also meant that the patient's next steps could be established without a prolonged wait**.'

'I was able to send photographs directly to a paediatric consultant and received a rapid response confirming that the patient should be referred.'

Dermatology advice helps manage complex patient in the community

Kathleen has also **used photo messaging to obtain specialist advice for a patient with a persistent skin problem** who had sought help from multiple clinicians:

> '**The patient had seen four different GPs, been to out-of-hours, and come to see me**. He'd tried a variety of different medications, including some strong steroid treatment. And **one of the out-of-hours doctors had told him he needed an urgent dermatology referral**.'

Kathleen and the patient agreed that **she would send some photographs to a dermatologist via Consultant Connect before proceeding with a referral**.

> '**I received the reply within 24 hours, and the consultant gave me a structured treatment regime and diagnosis**, and that has been a really good outcome, because it will manage the patient's expectations – the fact that a specialist has seen the photographs and taken his history into consideration, has resulted in a management plan instead of a referral.'

"I received the reply within 24 hours, and the consultant gave me a structured treatment regime and diagnosis.'

Although the patient wanted a dermatology referral following the appointment, Kathleen explained that this did not necessarily mean one was clinically indicated. **Specialist advice provided her with a plan to manage the condition in the community**, whilst reassuring the patient that his symptoms had been thoroughly assessed.

Previous advice supports ongoing care in the community

Access to specialist advice also helps Kathleen **apply previous learning to patients with similar presentations**, supporting decisions about when further investigations or referrals are needed.

> 'We see a lot of gynaecology problems, where in the past I've perhaps been uncertain about what is the best next step, and based on previous advice that I've received via Consultant Connect, **I've been able to apply that to patients who present with similar symptoms**.'

Kathleen particularly values the Menopause advice line, which supports complex cases where standard treatment options may be ineffective or unsuitable.

> 'It's especially helpful because it's a big part of my job, and sometimes I see patients where HRT prescribed based on guidelines isn't really effective, is causing side effects, or they may have a health problem, making prescribing more challenging. **Having a service for complicated queries has been great, and is something I'd otherwise have to refer the patient for**.
>
> 'As a result, **the consultants provide advice that enables me to tailor the treatment to the patient's circumstances, all within a community setting**.'

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