

Digital Innovation for Future-proofing Primary Care



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Opening the doorway to a different NHS

At Push Doctor, we have always been deeply proud to partner with the National Health Service, but never more so than in the face of the monumental challenges our NHS has faced in the last 16 months.

Under immense strain, the NHS handled the greatest health crisis in this country's modern history and has overseen the successful rollout of a vaccine which we hope, in the near future, will consign the pandemic to the past.

These are remarkable achievements. But the passing of the pandemic will not remove the NHS's pre-existing and longer-term demographic, funding and structural pressures, which have been exacerbated by Covid-19, not caused by it.

The pandemic tested the mettle of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) - a relatively new piece of the NHS's architecture - but one which played a central role in meeting the challenges of Covid-19.

In the post-pandemic world, we believe PCNs will be key engines of digital innovation within our health system. In this report we are proud to shine a light on some of the creativity and fresh thinking which is helping these groups of GP practices to close the primary care capacity gap, tackle health inequalities and equalise access to digital healthcare.

This includes:

- How Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare Trust is using Push Doctor across 46 GP Practices - over 300,000 patients - to address health inequalities and build back post-Covid
- How Warrington Innovation Network is using additional clinician types like physiotherapists and pharmacists to alleviate recruitment burdens and improve medical support and choice for patients
- How Heaton Moor Medical Group is using Push Doctor to address patient demand and increase resource during busy periods



“In the post-pandemic world, we believe PCNs will be key engines of digital innovation within our health system”

Matt Elcock


Managing Director, Push Doctor

Push Doctor began life as the UK's first platform to offer video consultations online and via smartphone – offering quick, easy and convenient access to NHS-trained, GMC-registered doctors - but these days our technology does much more than that. We help surgeries manage demand, matching patients with the clinician best suited to help them in the first-instance, while also enabling the NHS's many disparate databases to communicate seamlessly with each other.

Our collaboration with the National Health Service continues to grow and we now reach 5.8 million NHS patients. By working in partnership with PCNs and others in primary care, Push Doctor opens a doorway to a different NHS. Still the same amazing organisation that we all know and cherish, but one which finds new ways to benefit patients by putting powerful digital technology in the hands of clinicians.

Matt Elcock
Founder & Managing Director

5.8
million



NHS patients reached
by Push Doctor



Primary care and digital technology: new solutions for familiar challenges

Primary care is the cornerstone of our health system. For many, primary care professionals are the first point of contact, meaning that they are often the first to see cancer, mental health conditions and early signs of chronic disease. Their role in directing patients to specialist clinicians so they can receive the right care is crucial in preventing the development of serious health issues.

Over the past year the importance of the NHS and its staff has been thrown into the spotlight. Whilst this has been a unique experience for the nation in understanding the value of our National Health Service, it has also had wide-ranging and detrimental effects for those working within and alongside it.

In primary care, GP practice staff are experiencing high levels of burnout, with as many as 36% of GPs considering early retirement due to workload pressures¹ and almost two thirds (63%) of clinical directors saying that the workload of practices in their network is unmanageable.² This is having an onward impact on GP resource - the number of permanent GPs has actually fallen by nearly 2,000 in the past few years to just under 27,000 full-time GPs.³ Demand for appointments has also skyrocketed, leading to increased pressures and an unmanageable workload for many GPs and practice staff.



“The NHS has demonstrated an incredibly high level of resilience during the pandemic. In terms of impact, Covid-19 has of course had some very negative outcomes. But there have also been positives. Push Doctor quickly developed and started to use technology to get ahead of the curve and triage access to services. This would not have been as accelerated under normal circumstances. What has clearly been demonstrated too, to my mind, is that it is the public pulling the train towards a digital triage future.”



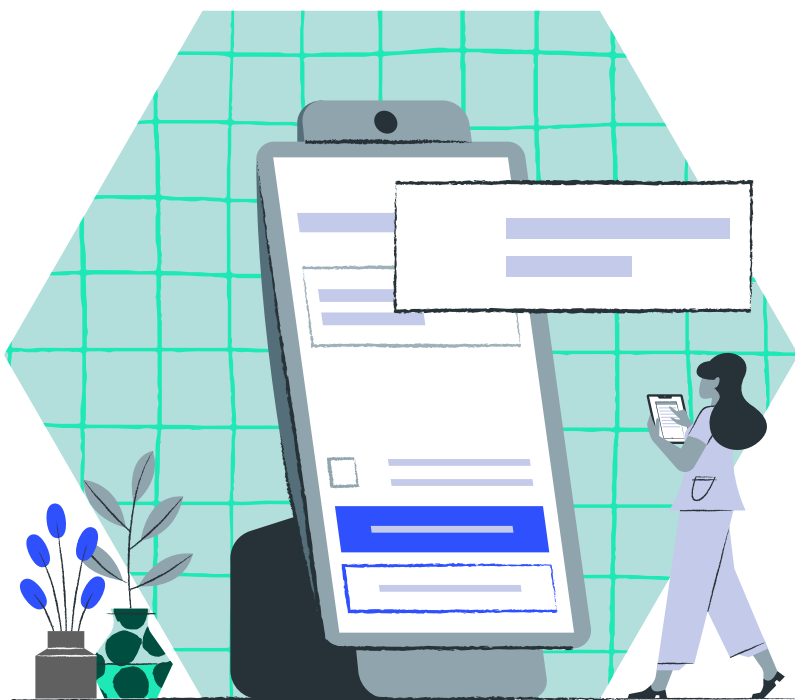
Ed Smith

Push Doctor Non-Executive Director and former Chairman of NHS Improvement

The capacity crisis in primary care needs to be addressed urgently. And this is where we see the power of digital solutions coming into their own - addressing patient access by quickly directing patients to the most appropriate care in the first instance, thus reducing the number of unnecessary GP appointments and alleviating pressure on an already overstretched workforce.

Push Doctor can also help PCNs meet demand by providing additional digital clinicians that GP practices can lean on when they need extra support. During the pandemic, we have seen GP practices use this option extensively as they seek to meet patient demand while protecting GPs and colleagues from burning out.

The future of healthcare can be difficult to predict, but the challenges which face us are familiar: how to do more with less in the face of long-term funding and demographic challenges. The pandemic has shown us how digital technology can help, by making healthcare systems more sustainable, efficient and joined-up, with clear benefits for clinicians and patients alike, in line with the NHS long-term plan.



The power of digital healthcare for patients and GPs



Primary care is facing its most challenging moment in history. But help is at hand. Push Doctor works with GP surgeries to relieve GP workload, tackle appointment backlog, and provide patients with greater flexibility in how they access healthcare, all without the hassle of recruitment.

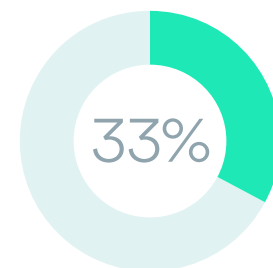
For patients

For patients, we provide:

- Free NHS video appointments through the Push Doctor app or website that are just like seeing a traditional clinician in a face-to-face environment, but more comfortable and convenient
- No need to de-register from their GP
- Faster and more flexible access to clinicians, with most able to get a digital appointment within the day or even hour, meaning no need to travel far or take time off work
- The potential for improved recovery times. For example, with our first contact physiotherapists, we can reduce the time from booking a first appointment, to referral, to surgical opinion from 22 weeks to as little as 6 weeks⁴
- Same day private and NHS prescriptions, instant sick notes, referrals and record syncing
- Safe and secure appointments - we are ORCHA certified and were rated “Good” in the Care Quality Commission’s latest report in 2019



Average time from booking to seeing a doctor with Push Doctor if booking a same day appointment



In the last 12 months, over a third (33%) of our consultations have been with patients over the age of 46



Case study



Hounslow and Richmond
Community Healthcare NHS Trust



Hounslow and Richmond
Community Healthcare
NHS Trust

Speaking to **Dr Akhil Mayor**, Primary Care Network deputy clinical director for Hounslow Health

Q. What led to you working with Push Doctor?

Our involvement with Push Doctor came through a need to get on the front foot in what is going to be a challenging number of years. Access to GP support has always been a challenge, but now we are under increasing pressure to improve the proactive nature of primary care to keep people out of secondary care. Working with Push Doctor addresses this through providing additional GP capacity where we crucially need it.

Q. Who is driving demand for digital consultations? Is it GPs, patients or someone else?

It's both. Patients are driving it because they want access that fits in with their busy lives. In Hounslow, we live in a 24/7 society and people need to make it fit around their lives. They don't want to be leaving work to visit the doctor. But we've also had demand from GPs and practice team members to offer a 21st century solution for healthcare.

Q. What made Push Doctor stand out to you?

Push Doctor stood out to us primarily because of the ease of access for patients and the ease of the technology to use. It's hugely important to us that patients find the service simple to use. After all, it's for them.

Q. How easy was it to get the partnership up and running?

The whole process was really easy. Push Doctor was organised and had a clear structure and process to follow. They gave my team a lot of their time to answer questions and queries, which made onboarding much easier. They also took the time to speak to every single practice, all 46 of them, which was incredibly helpful.

Q. How has Push Doctor helped you?

Push Doctor helps us to be more available for the people that need help. It's a simple service from a patient perspective, allowing us to strike a balance between continuity and ease of access. Whatever digital solution you have, it must be simple for the patient and practice, and not give either additional administration or burden. Some of our most complicated face-to-face patients who have a strong relationship with a practice are now using Push Doctor as a digital solution, which is fantastic to see.

Q. Do you think a digital first model is the future for your PCN?

We'll always offer a choice. Primary care is on a triage basis now, and our ambition is to offer people a suite of options – telephone, video, home visit or a regular GP appointment. Digital should absolutely be embedded into everyday working moving forward, but part of that will always be offering a choice of virtual and in-person appointments.

For the NHS

At present, each face-to-face patient appointment costs the NHS approximately £30-50. But by partnering with digital platforms like Push Doctor, the NHS can save as much as 33% on that cost.

We allow clinicians at the 250+ practices we partner with – who are under enormous pressure even in more normal times – to better manage demands on their time through providing an on-demand digital workforce. GPs are dealing with a third more clinical administrative work and 8% more appointments than this time two years ago.^{5,6} Our digital workforce of locum GPs, ARRS-funded clinicians, and Community Pharmacists in our CPCS-funded digital minor ailments service can cater to a host of requirements and can be onboarded at your practice(s) in as little as one day.



£650,000

estimated NHS savings over a year, and if every NHS appointment that could be digital was, it would save even more.



17,233

hours of appointment time we saved PCNs in 2020 alone

“Video consultations bring patients as close to a GP as possible without seeing one in-person and patients report a higher degree of trust and engagement with a clinician when accessed through video compared to traditional telephone appointments. GPs spend a lot of consultation time looking into the eyes of a patient to see their stress, strains and vulnerabilities. Digital enablement has gone a long way to delivering this same experience, but via video. It will, of course, never be able to replace face-to-face, but it can be incredibly powerful working alongside it.”

Ed Smith

Push Doctor Non-Executive Director and former Chairman of NHS Improvement



Case study Well Pharmacy



In February 2021 we partnered with Well Pharmacy, the UK’s largest independent pharmacy chain, to launch the country’s first pharmacy-first digital service for patients across Warrington Innovation Network PCN.

It is estimated that around 20 million GP appointments each year could be treated by pharmacists who are clinically trained to treat minor ailments.⁷ By adopting a pharmacy-first approach, patients who access the Push Doctor platform with such concerns will be directed to a pharmacist who will be able to offer quick and effective treatment online. This will free up GP appointments for those with serious or chronic health issues, easing the burden on the local NHS at a time of unprecedented demand.

Using the Push Doctor platform patients are able to access a highly trained Well Pharmacist flexibly at a time that suits them. Patients can conduct digital consultations using any device with video capability and internet connection. These consultations are Covid-safe, confidential, and conducted at no additional cost to the NHS.



We provide:

- **Personalised support package:** We'll create a bespoke package of digital locum GPs, named ARRS clinicians and/or Minor Ailments Service suited to your needs and funding options.
- **24 hour onboarding:** Easy, free onboarding in as little as one day with our expert relationship team who will guide your team through training, integration and beyond.
- **Flexible, remote support:** Our clinicians are ready to see your patients via video consultation on our app and website, with flexibility to scale resource up and down as required.
- **Funding options:** Many of our solutions are available to practices and PCNs under various local and centrally-funded schemes.

So why use our workforce?

- **Meet demand:** *“With Push Doctor, our GP practices have the opportunity to be much less risk averse when managing appointments. They can bring in more complex patients for review, knowing that they have significant additional resources to fall back on if there are peaks in demand.”* **Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare NHS Trust**
- **Prevent burnout:** *“Previously, with GP sickness and annual leave, on a Monday we would only have two GPs on call. This means unmanageable workload and patient backlog. Having Push Doctor to supplement capacity has been invaluable.”* **Queen’s Medical Centre**
- **Patient accessibility:** *“Ultimately the Push Doctor service provides our patients choice. Patients who would prefer to see a GP face-to-face can still absolutely do this. But for those who value greater speed and flexibility, the platform is hugely valuable.”* **Heaton Moor Medical Group**

It’s important to stress that this isn’t about replacing face-to-face appointments and there will always be a need for medical professionals to engage with patients in-person. We view video consultations as akin to email or messaging services - a great tool for communicating quickly and efficiently in many circumstances, but not something that can or should replace an in-person conversation or physical assessment when one is needed.

“Push Doctor is efficient, flexible and convenient; a win-win for the practice and patients,”



Dr Dan Bunstone

Clinical Director at Warrington Innovation Network and Chief Medical Officer

“Working with Push Doctor has given us the flexibility to provide additional appointments to patients that need to see a GP or clinician. The majority of these are on-the-day consultations involving minimal waiting time. Plus, the online element works well with our other health services and satisfies a broad range of patient needs. Patients are directed to Push Doctor by our care navigators, which removes the need for them to be referred by a GP and saves vital clinical time.”

Warrington Innovation Network



Case study

Waterside Health Network PCN

Speaking to **Steve Bates**, PCN Manager at Waterside Health Network PCN

Q. What led to you working with Push Doctor?

We wanted to improve access for our patients outside of core hours, which is what we used Push Doctor for initially. This gave patients the ability to book video appointments between 6:30pm and 8:00pm on weekdays and 9:00am to 5:00pm on Saturday and Sunday. Push Doctor slotted into exactly what we wanted to do, and it has quickly become an integral part of our service to patients. After seeing the benefits, practices have really embraced it and started using it to offer appointments within their core hours. We recently launched the minor ailments service and we're already thinking about future ways to work with Push Doctor.

Q. What made Push Doctor stand out to you?

Push Doctor has a fantastic reputation, which is also clear from the number of other practices Push Doctor is already working with. Plus, we knew Push Doctor works closely with the CQC and is very strong on clinical governance, which is reassuring. Alongside this, the projects Push Doctor were working on were exciting and we bought into that. We really see a future in virtual services and it's great to have different offers for patients. Not everyone wants to come into a GP practice when they can book a video appointment at a time that's convenient for them.

Q. How easy was it to get the partnership up and running?

The onboarding process has been good. The Push Doctor team went through the whole system on a Zoom call, and I've backed this up with face-to-face support in practices, so we've worked together. The portal is very simple to use. It's about getting care navigators comfortable with it, so it becomes embedded.

That's when it really takes off when staff are comfortable with referring and offering the service to patients and they have a positive journey. Building confidence is really important. Care navigators want to be reassured that patients are getting a good service and there will be positive outcomes for both practices and patients.

Q. Why are you using the minor ailments service?

Push Doctor's minor ailments service fits in well with what we're doing in Devon. Last year, we ran a community pharmacy consultation process whereby GPs could refer patients straight to a community pharmacist face-to-face. When Covid-19 struck, it made sense to bring this in virtually. Now with the combination of face-to-face and virtual, we've got a really strong offer for minor illnesses. Primary care needs to work smarter. GPs don't need to deal with lots of the conditions they do, but it is about the patient and their individual choice. With Push Doctor, we are giving them an additional convenient option.

Q. Do you think a digital first model is the future for your PCN?

There's value in both digital and face-to-face for patients – it's really down to personal choice.

It also boils down to what your health is like. If you have a complex health issue, you build a relationship with a clinician because you see them regularly and they can navigate you through the system. This often dictates the type of contact [patients] want with a clinician and the type of patient journey they need. There's definitely a future place for virtual services in healthcare. It gives us a greater offer and takes the pressure off which is key.

Spotlight on ARRS roles

Push Doctor now offers various clinician types on the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS), meaning PCNs and GP practices have a flexible solution to the challenges of recruiting, training and supervising these specialist roles.

Our available clinicians are:

- Clinical Pharmacists:** This role has proven to be the most difficult for PCNs to hire. Our digital Clinical Pharmacists are able to conduct remote care home visits, complete medication-related admin, review long-term conditions (e.g. diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and prescribe - worksteams which often take up a lot of GP time. Through using Clinical Pharmacists this valuable time can be saved, benefiting the practice and GP team resource.
- First Contact Physiotherapists:** Digital FCPs can provide all the exercise and treatment advice expected of a face-to-face consultation. By taking care of musculoskeletal conditions, these clinicians can cover up to 30% of GP workload, according to NHS England.

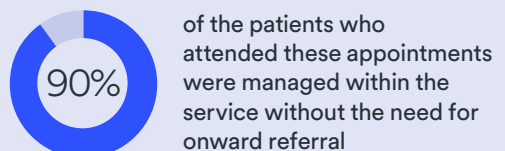
Our additional roles are also location-agnostic, meaning that GP practices anywhere in the country can hire a named clinician without the struggles of local recruitment and retention. This will help to reduce health inequalities due to unequal distribution of staff, and ultimately mean better outcomes for patients.

Case study Pure Physiotherapy



In 2020 we partnered with Warrington Innovation Network (WIN) to bolster the number of first contact physiotherapists available in the area. By offering remote consultations through our platform, WIN can offer the equivalent capacity of two full-time physiotherapists.

This illustrates just how effectively remote first contact physiotherapist appointments can help to manage GP workload. Without the Warrington Innovation Network and Push Doctor partnership, these patients simply would not have been seen in such short lead times.



“Our GPs and clinicians have been under immense pressure during the pandemic and I am certain that this would have been even worse without the variety of roles that Push Doctor has provided. The availability of these different clinician types has definitely helped both patients and staff as it means patients can be directed immediately to the right care from the right medical professional. Using Push Doctor to recruit clinicians like clinical pharmacists has helped us secure the workforce we needed for our PCN while ensuring our funding is being used appropriately. In offering these roles both physically and digitally, we’ve been able to improve access to medical support for the community.”

Warrington Innovation Network

Barriers to digital adoption

Integral to our approach is addressing barriers to digital adoption, for both patients and practices, whilst also honestly acknowledging the limitations of digital and understanding where face-to-face care is best.

This section explores some of the potential barriers to digital adoption and the work Push Doctor is doing to overcome them.

Data and privacy

As digital solutions continue to transform the healthcare landscape, patient data security and privacy must keep up pace. It is the responsibility of Push Doctor and all other companies operating in this space to maintain the exceptionally high standards of which patients, clinicians and the NHS rightly demand.

Delivering safely

With all healthcare technologies, the crucial thing is that the products and the people behind them keep delivering to an exceptionally high standard. There is an onus on companies like Push Doctor to continue to listen to our partners and to adapt and improve our services and most importantly, not to lose sight of what matters most – patient safety and positive clinical outcomes. We were rated “Good” in the Care Quality Commission’s latest report in 2019, with “Outstanding” in the well led category, which shows recognition of all the hard work we have put into delivering a high-quality service for our patients.

For us, the patient is the most important person. If they can have confidence that they are going to receive the very best care - from the ease of their own home or on the go - then we will be able to sustain and grow the positive impact that tech has on healthcare delivery.

“In terms of patient use and take-up of digital services, there is some hesitancy about data and privacy that exists. This is understandable since medical data is incredibly private and can be open to inappropriate use if in the wrong hands. Push Doctor is committed to privacy and security, with a dedicated data protection and legal team and robust policies so patients can feel confident that their data is safe. It’s also our job to provide care which meets the very highest standards of safety and delivers the best possible experience for patients.”

Ed Smith

Push Doctor Non-Executive Director and former Chairman of NHS Improvement

“As with any digital solution, there can be challenges in terms of access and digital inclusion. That’s why it’s hugely important that we use our additional capacity wisely, bringing in patients who can’t use digital services to the surgery as they normally would, and allowing those who can access digital devices, and want to, to use video consultations.”

**Hounslow and Richmond
Community Healthcare
NHS Trust**



Balancing face-to-face vs digital

At Push Doctor it is not our goal to replace in-person care. There will always be a need for medical professionals to engage with patients in person, but there is certainly a significant amount of patient care that can be undertaken safely and to high clinical standards remotely. A mixed model provides strength to GP practices, easing the burden on doctors and nurses and allowing them to carry out the things that need to be done inperson, better.

We understand the vital position digital plays *alongside* face-to-face, in the continued delivery of excellent patient care. And our partners agree.

Staff confidence

We know the introduction of new digital services, which are often used alongside other services, can be difficult for practice staff and GPs to get to grips with. That's why whilst we can onboard practices in as little as a day, we also go to great lengths to make sure that practice staff – those who ultimately will direct patients to the service – are comfortable and confident.

Digital exclusion

11 million people – about 20% of the population – lack basic digital skills, or do not use digital technology at all.⁸ As a leading provider of remote consultations, we understand our responsibility to help tackle health inequalities and make digital health accessible to everyone.

Despite the acceleration of digital services due to Covid-19, there are still many patients who struggle to access the internet and smartphones – and patients facing these barriers must not be left behind. At Push Doctor, we know that having the right support and processes in place to help people access digital is vital. That's why as an industry, we must work together to prevent people experiencing differences in healthcare based on factors often outside their control, and enable everyone to share in the benefits of digital.

“The onboarding process has been good. The Push Doctor team went through the whole system on a Zoom call, and I’ve backed this up with face-to-face support in practices, so we’ve worked together. The portal is very simple to use. It’s about getting care navigators comfortable with it, so it becomes embedded. That’s when it really takes off when staff are comfortable with referring and offering the service to patients and they have a positive journey.”

**Waterside Health
Network PCN**

“Getting the service up and running was incredibly easy. In fact, we did it in just 24 hours! As well as our GPs and patients finding it easy to use, our reception team have also found it a simple process, which is great as getting them on board with new technology is crucial. Push Doctor sent over lots of helpful information, guidelines on what medical issues can and can’t be treated, age ranges, scripts for our reception staff and more. It was all incredibly well received and executed.”

Queen’s Medical Centre

Push Doctor solutions

1. Accessibility

As a healthcare company we have always been conscious to ensure our service is accessible through the basics, such as: colour contrast, hierarchy, layout and ease of use, but we're in the current throws of a deep dive into our broader accessibility, and how we can enhance our alignment with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

2. Clinician Gender

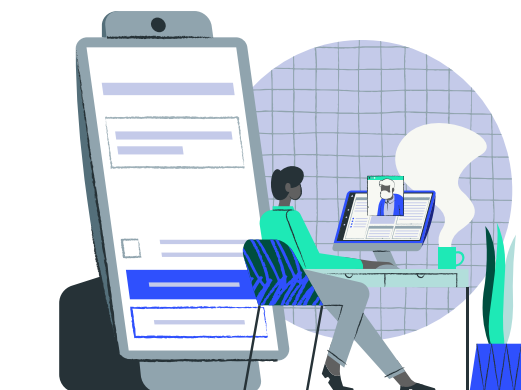
For those that need to see a clinician of a specific gender, for religious or other reasons, our service now offers the ability to choose this, with support from our patient experience team.

3. Digital Ambassadors

The Digital Ambassador project works towards giving patients that may not be technically confident, haven't used our service before or just need some support, an 'ask-us-anything' session with a Push Doctor expert. This aims to support and empower them to take charge of their digital health.

4. Multiple Languages

Providing our service in multiple languages is so important for us to ensure we are offering our services to everyone that needs them. We are close to releasing our first version of this project to our live service in certain areas to allow those that have Polish as their first language to have an interpreter present in their online video consultation, with a view to rolling out more languages in the near future.



“Using Push Doctor can definitely help reduce health inequalities by widening access to healthcare, adding capacity and helping to ensure patients get the right care at the right time, and from the right clinician. This is something primary care has been trying to achieve for a long time.”

Warrington Innovation Network

“We are always conscious that digital solutions can increase inequalities, and that’s why we have solutions in place to combat this. For example, Push Doctor is now building a language translation feature to allow us to provide digital appointments to patients who do not speak English or are not confident speaking English. This means we can better serve our language diverse population. The platform is also simple to use for patients, who have access to video tutorials on the site and on YouTube.”

Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare NHS Trust

The future of healthcare

The pandemic has accelerated changes to the ways society uses technology, proving that digital patient consultations are here to stay.

Clinicians and patients agree. At Push Doctor, we now serve 5.8 million patients in England through partnerships with over 250 practices, and that number is growing quickly. That's why alongside supporting patients and practices now, we are also looking ahead to focus our services on scaling-up the NHS's digital offering at a critical time in its existence.

With more patient demand coupled with fewer staff, we believe triaging patients more effectively based on their medical records and symptoms so they are put in front of the right clinician at the right time, be that a doctor, physiotherapist or pharmacist, will make a huge difference. This in turn reduces demand on GP surgeries and enables GPs to deal with more complex cases face-to-face.

For Push Doctor, the future of healthcare is making systems more sustainable and joined-up for the long-term and using what we have more efficiently through digital technology, as a partner of the NHS.



If you are interested in working with Push Doctor to create a more sustainable and joined-up healthcare system we would love to hear from you.

Contact

info@pushdr.com

07944 843265

About Push Doctor

Push Doctor opens a doorway to a different NHS.

We work in partnership with the NHS to serve more than 5.8 million patients, helping them access healthcare quickly and easily via video appointments using smartphones and computers. We do this with a relentless focus on safety and high-quality clinical outcomes for patients.

Our technology helps surgeries manage demand, matching patients with the right clinician – from digital GPs to physiotherapists to pharmacists – at the right time. This takes the burden off GPs and frees up their time to see patients who really need face-to-face care. We also offer a private service for those patients who want it.

We are the longest standing digital partner to the NHS and the only platform that can fully integrate across all NHS platforms and services. We are trusted as the leading expert in enabling remote consultations and are rated ‘good’ by the Care Quality Commission.

Find out more at: <https://www.pushdoctor.co.uk/>



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