

The role of digital communication in patient–clinician communication for NHS providers of specialist clinical services for young people [the Long-term conditions Young people Networked Communication (LYNC) study]: a mixed-methods study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

The LYNC study

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Plain English summary

Young people with long-term conditions (LTCs) (e.g. diabetes mellitus or asthma) often avoid engaging with health care. Young people are also heavy users of digital communications (e.g. texting, social media). This project evaluated the use of these technologies between young people and their health-care providers.

During the study we:

- conducted observations at clinics which cared for young people with LTCs
- interviewed patients and clinic staff
- reviewed recent research
- identified and evaluated a range of questionnaires that ask patients what outcomes matter to them when assessing the impact of digital clinical communication (DCC).

We studied 20 NHS clinical teams and interviewed:

- 165 young people (aged 16–24 years) living with LTCs
- 13 parents
- 173 clinical team members
- 16 people responsible for the management of information/patient data.

Our study showed that DCC:

- generally took place alongside traditional appointments
- was appreciated by young people, who liked being able to contact their clinician when they needed to, empowering them to manage their condition
- was used by clinicians to engage with their young patients, particularly when the patient faced change in their life/health
- contained some risk (such as e-mail not answered), but both clinicians and young people took steps to make it safe
- increased staff workload, but clinicians had not assessed its impact on patients
- is popular among young people, but that there was no direct evidence of health benefits except for mental health (as found through the research review)
- could usefully be assessed in the future by two different questionnaires.

Digital clinical communication is perceived as being beneficial to young people with LTCs, although there is little evidence as to the impact on health. Future studies should explore the impact of replacing traditional with digital appointments.

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