

A 'telephone first' approach to demand management in English general practice: a multimethod evaluation

Jennifer Newbould,^{1*} Sarah Ball,¹ Gary Abel,² Matthew Barclay,³ Tray Brown,³ Jennie Corbett,¹ Brett Doble,³ Marc Elliott,⁴ Josephine Exley,¹ Anna Knack,⁵ Adam Martin,¹ Emma Pitchforth,¹ Catherine Saunders,³ Edward CF Wilson,³ Eleanor Winpenny,¹ Miaoqing Yang¹ and Martin Roland³

¹Cambridge Centre for Health Services Research, RAND Europe, Cambridge, UK

²University of Exeter Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

³Cambridge Centre for Health Services Research, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

⁴RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, USA

⁵RAND Europe, Cambridge, UK

*Corresponding author newbould@rand.org

Declared competing interests of authors: Eleanor Winpenny reports grants from UK Clinical Research Collaboration [Medical Research Council (MRC)] and grants from MRC, outside the submitted work.

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

Published May 2019

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07170

Plain English summary

The Tele-First multimethod evaluation

Health Services and Delivery Research 2019; Vol. 7: No. 17

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07170

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain English summary

Every one of us wants to be able to visit our family doctor when needed. With so many more patients, this is becoming increasingly difficult. The study looked at a new way to ask for help from one's doctor to see if this would save overall time and NHS money. Patients were asked to speak first to a general practitioner (GP) or doctor by telephone to see if their problems could be dealt with over the telephone or if they needed to see the doctor in person. Practices using the 'telephone first' approach were compared with other practices that were not using it.

In a patient survey, it was shown that just over half of patients found it easier to make appointments with the 'telephone first' approach than with the previous system, with nearly one-quarter finding it less easy or the same. It was quicker to make an appointment in those practices using this new way, but, when asked, patients and practice staff had strong views both for and against the new system. Factors affecting patient satisfaction included the ease of getting through to the general practice on the telephone and how easy it was to wait for the callback from the GP (e.g. if the patient was at work).

'Telephone first' greatly increased the number of doctor consultations by telephone, with around half of problems managed in this way. This led to more work for practice staff, although there were big differences between practices, with some having much more work and others having much less. There was not much difference in the use of hospital services or in the costs of hospital care.

Although the study showed that, by using the 'telephone first' approach, many health problems can be dealt with over the telephone, this will not solve the increasing need for care by our family doctors.

Margaret Johnson, patient and public involvement member

Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the *Health Services and Delivery Research* journal

Reports are published in *Health Services and Delivery Research* (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: <http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr>

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 13/59/40. The contractual start date was in September 2014. The final report began editorial review in July 2017 and was accepted for publication in February 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2019. This work was produced by Newbould et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).

NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

Professor Ken Stein Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor John Powell Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Editor-in-Chief of HTA and EME journals. Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK, and Honorary Professor, University of Manchester, and Senior Clinical Researcher and Associate Professor, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, UK

Professor Andrée Le May Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals) and Editor-in-Chief of HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals

Professor Matthias Beck Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

Dr Tessa Crilly Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Eugenia Cronin Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

Dr Peter Davidson Consultant Advisor, Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

Ms Tara Lamont Director, NIHR Dissemination Centre, UK

Dr Catriona McDaid Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

Professor William McGuire Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

Professor John Norrie Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

Professor James Raftery Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

Professor Helen Roberts Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, UK

Professor Jonathan Ross Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

Professor Helen Snooks Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Professor Ken Stein Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

Professor Jim Thornton Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

Professor Martin Underwood Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk