

Digital First Primary Care for those with multiple long-term conditions: a rapid review of the views of stakeholders

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Healthcare professionals want to provide the best primary care in the face of increasing pressures, as well as improve access to care for patients. Digital First Primary Care is one response to this situation, when a patients' first contact with primary care is through a digital route, either through a laptop or smartphone. Online systems allow the patient to provide information to their practice about their symptoms or needs and request a response from a health professional.

Our study aimed to understand how Digital First Primary Care works for healthcare professionals providing care to increasing numbers of patients with multiple long-term conditions and their carers.

Firstly, we examined the relatively limited existing findings and then interviewed healthcare professionals and key stakeholders experienced in digital approaches within primary care (e.g. from policy organisations, universities and the National Health Service). While we attempted to speak to patients and carers directly, unfortunately the pressures in general practice meant we were unable to do so. However, the study was co-designed with patients.

Healthcare professionals and stakeholders felt that patients with multiple long-term conditions faced additional challenges with the use of Digital First Primary Care compared to other patients. For example, they reported difficulties navigating online forms and not being able to speak with a general practitioner who knew them well. There were differing views from healthcare professionals and stakeholders about how far Digital First Primary Care could help staff in general practice and enhance care. For some clinicians, the workload was easier to manage and some simple tasks (e.g. sick notes) could be completed quickly. This could reduce stress for staff and mean more patients could be seen per day. Others felt that the digital system had shortcomings. This could be important for patients with multiple long-term conditions; for example, when a digital form may not fully inform the general practitioner as to the exact nature of the problem, potentially requiring a further follow-up appointment. Health professionals reported that carers of patients with multiple long-term conditions generally liked the new systems as they helped to improve contact with general practice staff.

The summary was co-authored by members of the BRACE Patient and Public Involvement group.

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This article

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