

Delivering virtual group consultations

The PGP plan to improve our virtual group consultation (VGC) delivery

HIYOS took part in the Productive General Practice (PGP) Quick Start programme, to develop a standard process for VGCs that would help improve patient and staff engagement. PGP Quick Start is part of the support offered by the Time for Care team, which is a Primary Care Improvement delivery team within NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Identifying the problem

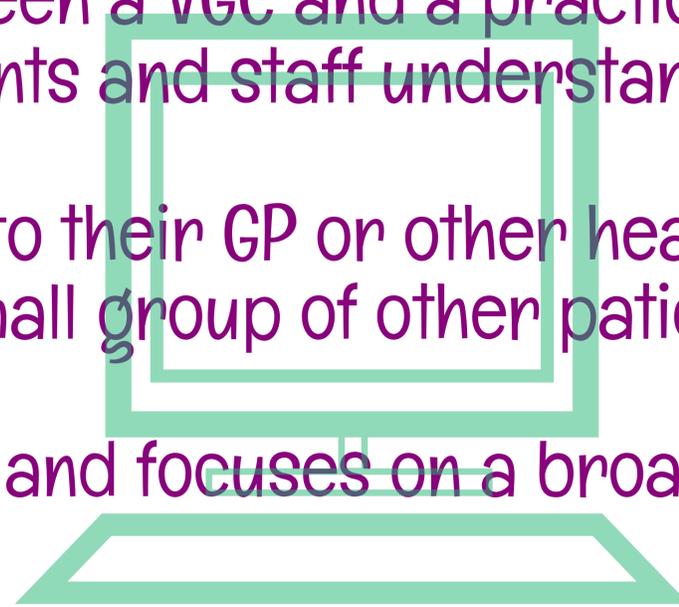
We were delivering VGCs but finding it hard to engage patients and some staff with the service. The PGP Quick Start programme helped us to come up with a plan to improve the service. Using process mapping we reviewed each step of the current process to identify what the issues were. Having a clear understanding of the issues helped the team prioritise what improvements it needed to work on.

- Patients and staff were confused as to what the difference was between a VGC and the webinars we provided.
- Patients were largely unaware of the service.
- Clinicians had no standard material to deliver a session and so were creating it from scratch, leading to inconsistencies.
- After each session clinicians were spending extra time going into each patient record and noting they had attended a VGC.

Solving the problem: The difference between a VGC and a webinar

We clarified the difference between a VGC and a practice webinar. This clarity reduced confusion and helped both patients and staff understand what each service offered.

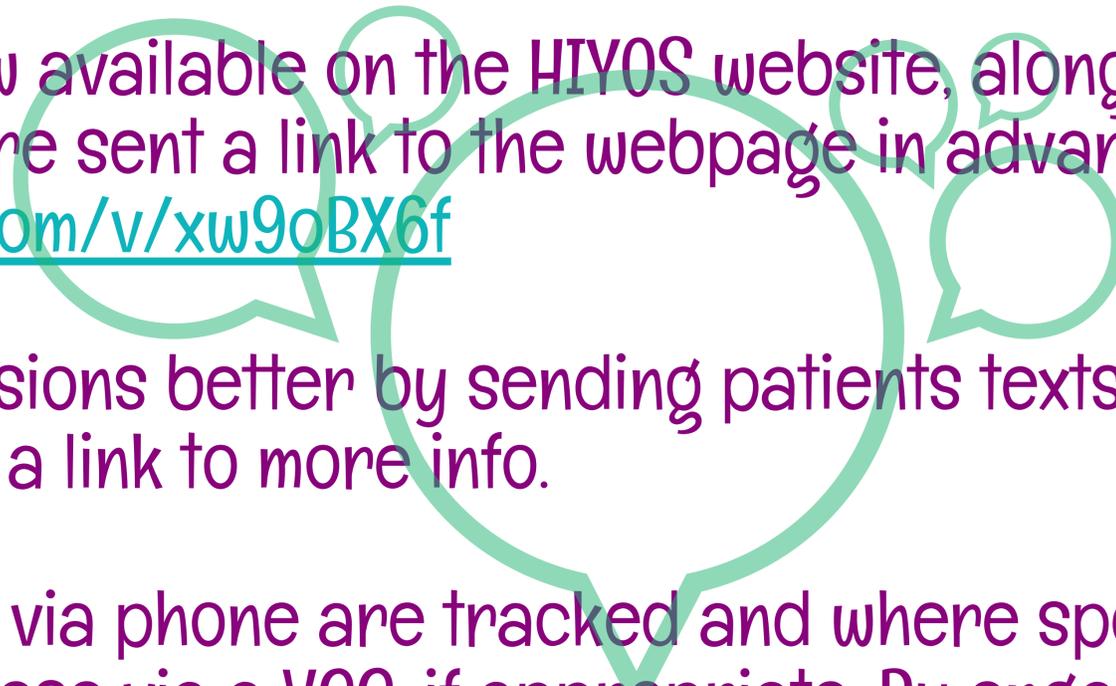
- VGC= where a patient speaks to their GP or other healthcare professional to discuss their health condition online, in a small group of other patients with the same issues.
- Webinar = open to all patients and focuses on a broader issue to help inform, educate and entertain patients.



Solving the problem: Engaging better with patients

We made a number of improvements:

- Info about VGC is now available on the HIYOS website, along with a short film. Patients who are new to the service are sent a link to the webpage in advance of joining a session.
<https://videopress.com/v/xw9oBX6f>
- We now promote sessions better by sending patients texts/emails before, with details about the consultation and a link to more info.
- Queries that come in via phone are tracked and where specific common issues are identified, we try to address these via a VGC, if appropriate. By engaging better with patients take up for the service has improved.



Solving the problem: Support like for clinicians

- We developed a standard slide set covering consent, patient agreement and meeting controls. It provides basic material for clinicians to build on and tailor to the theme/topic of their consultation.
- We created a standard template on SystmOne which documents VGCs with the necessary read code and agreement, reducing the time clinicians spend having to update a patient record.

Staff are more confident in delivering VGCs now.

Testing the revised process

The team updated the process map, shared it with all staff and tested it over the following weeks. Patient uptake improved and showed the service is most effective when there is quick reaction to issues identified. For example, a number of calls were received one morning from women experiencing period pains, that same afternoon the practice put on a VGC which 8 women attended. For the practice this was more efficient than having delivered 8 individual patient consultations.

What has the impact been?

- Take-up for the service has vastly improved e.g. 137 patients joined a VGC about COVID, with the session having taken approximately 40 minutes to deliver, it made 133 clinical appointments available that would have otherwise been used addressing similar issues had each patient been seen individually.
- Patient needs are being met in a timelier way. When the COVID vaccine first came out for the over 80s a number of patients were anxious and had questions. A VGC to answer their questions and provide reassurance was arranged at short notice and attended by 30 patients.
- We estimate that by continuing to provide VGCs we can release 444 clinical appointments per year, giving patients better access.
- By tracking patient queries and addressing specific issues through VGCs, congestion on the phone lines has reduced.
- Staff feel better supported and more confident about delivering the service, it is now seen as an embedded part of our service offer.



“It’s incredibly useful to drill down into the detail to help us move forward.” *Dr Talac Mahmud GP, HIYOS*

“The external challenge and perspective from an experienced facilitator is helping us to move forward.”
Imi Khan BD Manager, HIYOS

“It is really useful to step back and look at things in a new way.” *Saira Juma Practice Manager, HIYOS*

