PATIENT PARTNER CASE STUDY

“Patient Partner from Voice Connect has been specifically developed to solve day to day communications problems experienced in General Practice. An elegant, cost effective solution that benefits patients and staff alike”

Bermondsey and Lansdowne Medical Mission says Patient Partner ‘does just what was promised’

The Bermondsey and Lansdowne Medical Mission (www.decima.gpsurgery.net) is a relatively large GP surgery in Bermondsey, located between the Elephant and Castle and Tower Bridge just south of the Thames. As is usual in many urban areas, the practice’s patient demographic is multicultural with patients from a range of ethnic backgrounds and social class. The local residents live in a mix of private and social housing.

The medical centre, which has over 13,000 patients registered on its list, is one of two surgeries which make up the central London practice. There are currently 4 partners plus 12 additional GPs working part time at the surgery, with another 22 staff employed in a range of clinical and administrative roles. The practice runs a range of clinics, including antenatal care and family planning, as well as offering services to advise on health issues such as hypertension, diabetes and nutrition.

Bermondsey and Lansdowne Medical Mission has been using Voice Connect’s automated Patient Partner system since September 2007. The system was originally introduced as a way of reducing the call congestion that was particularly common at peak times, and as a way of offering patients increased flexibility in booking appointments. Whilst the surgery currently has four telephone lines available for call queuing, it can still be difficult to handle a large influx of calls when the surgery opens at 8.30am, a time when people often call to make emergency or routine appointments.

“We felt that, by giving our patients more choice in when they could call to make appointments, we would be able to reduce call congestion at peak times,” comments Sonia McVinnie, Assistant Practice Manager at Bermondsey and Lansdowne. “We did have some concerns prior to installation about how we would collect telephone numbers so that our patients could have access to the system and also how we would advertise the system. However, the support from the Voice Connect helpdesk has always been good – they are on hand whenever they are needed.”

“We are happy with the Patient Partner system and so are our patients”
Whilst the surgery currently has four telephone lines available for call queuing, it can still be difficult to handle a large influx of calls when the surgery opens at 8.30am, a time when people often call to make emergency or routine appointments. So a system like Patient Partner, which allows people to make appointments if they feel unwell in the night rather than when they get up, or late in the evening rather than before leaving for work in the morning, means that call traffic at these times is reduced.

Assistant Practice Manager Sonia reports that Patient Partner has made a significant contribution to the day to day running of the practice by improving the whole call handling process, through reducing call congestion and freeing up receptionists’ time so they are able to deal with other administrative task to facilitate the smooth running of the practice. “Because patients are able to book or cancel their appointments at any time, they now find it easier to make an appointment and access has improved, which was one of our main aims in introducing the system.”

Patient Partner’s top three features are:
1. Reduces time and workload for reception staff.
2. The system is available 24 hours a day.
3. The system has improved patient access.

Sonia also reports that the patients are happy with the system, and that removing the frustration of queuing and the engaged tone combined with improved access has increased patient satisfaction. “We didn’t realise quite how many patients were using the system until we audited the figures – and we were pleasantly surprised at how many appointments have been made in the past 12 months using the Patient Partner service,” explains Sonia. However, the practice is keen to continue proactively promoting the service and encouraging further patient uptake with support from Voice Connect.

“Nobody likes to queue – and Patient Partner has helped to cut queuing times at the practice”

After using the system for several years, the Bermondsey and Lansdowne Medical Mission is happy to recommend Patient Partner to other practices who want to improve patient access to their services, but advises that the system works best when adjusted to the individual surgery’s needs. “We are happy with the Patient Partner system and so are our patients - it does just what was promised. We are pleased to be able to use the service to give our patients an increased choice and enhance their experience at our centre.”

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